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**Through The Esses –
Bruce McLaren's Memory Preserved – A Personal Journey**

03/22/11 © Andrew S. Hartwell

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There are times in our lives when we get to experience something we never thought we would. ..if we are very fortunate. I enjoyed such good fortune this week when I had the opportunity to visit the birthplace and home of legendary Kiwi racer, constructor and engineer, Bruce McLaren. My wife Shirley and I were on a once-in-a-lifetime holiday visiting our son and daughter in law currently living and working in Auckland, New Zealand, and this visit to Bruce's birthplace was planned from the first day we were booked for our flights!



Bruce McLaren was always at the top of the list of my favorite people on the planet, and his always impeccably prepared McLaren M8A Can-Am racers were among the top three of my all time favorite sports cars. (The Chaparral 2E/2G and the 1967 Le Mans winning Ford GT40 MKIV round out my top three). I actually had the chance to shake his hand once, at the completion of the 1968 Bridgehampton Can-Am race, the one time that both he and his Kiwi compatriot Denny Hulme failed to finish a race in a series they would come to dominate over most of the series lifetime. Despite the poor results that day, Bruce was still wearing that signature smile of his and he took time on the way to the media center to shake my hand and give me a wave as I pointed my dad's super 8 movie camera in his direction.

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Bruce McLaren's memory and the story of his life are very much alive in Remuera, a suburb of Auckland and the city in which he grew up. The original McLaren family home is on the top floor of a working garage that today emanates the sounds of repairs being made to modern automobiles. When Bruce was growing up and finding his way in the world of wheels, the walls of the garage – purchased by his father in 1936 - resonated with the banging of hammers and wrenches applied to the construction of the earliest McLaren race cars. Above that garage today, Bruce's younger sister, Jan McLaren has created a wonderful museum in honor of her brother.

Jan is the CEO of the Bruce McLaren Trust, which she helped to found with Ross Jensen, another Kiwi racer, in 1997. The trust was created with the purpose of establishing and sustaining a living and working memorial to Bruce McLaren and the McLaren Team heritage. At present, the trust is operated out of the top floor of the garage building but in the future they hope to acquire the entire structure and use the ground floor to house some of Bruce's legendary race cars.

Today, you enter the McLaren home / trust through a single door at the front of the garage. You then begin a climb up a narrow stairway and all along the way you are surrounded by photographs and posters and articles about Bruce and Denny. At the top of the stairs you come to a small table displaying a guest book – one in which both the notable and the ordinary have entered their names. We added ours as well and then we turned around to be warmly greeted by Jan McLaren and a smiling gentleman by the name of David Rhodes. We soon came to learn that David is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about Bruce McLaren and Denny Hulme.

David took the time to tell us much about the many images that were liberally displayed on the walls and the history behind each one, along with pointing out the origins of the many medals and trophies on display throughout every room. We soon found ourselves standing in what had been Bruce's bedroom and there we marveled at all the precious items stacked, aligned and displayed therein.

We next were attended to by Jan and she continued to provide a wealth of information about the articles on display and the history of the trust and she shared with us the ambitions the trust held for expansion and the infinite perpetuation of Bruce's memory. She also told us that the trust has an inventory of images numbering in the thousands.

Having exchanged emails several times prior to our arrival, Jan felt comfortable enough with us to take us into a special room that housed several large safes. She opened two of them and from each she withdrew some incredible treasures.

From the first, she took out Bruce's original Can-Am driver's suit and graciously posed for me as I took her photo holding this remarkable piece of sportscar racing history. Its value could not possibly be calculated in mere dollars or pounds. The experience she was affording us, by allowing us to see and to touch his suit, can not be adequately recounted with mere words.

From the second safe she withdrew a substantially thick album containing many handwritten letters from Bruce to his parents. She told us that very few people had ever been able to access and read them fully. She said that Bruce always wrote home from wherever he was racing and kept his parents aware of his successes and disappointments alike.

To see these treasured family artifacts 'in the flesh' and see how he had so lovingly maintained his family ties over the years that his career took him away from home, only served to further validate our warm feelings for this great man.



Through the generous donations of many people the trust is nearing completion of a full restoration of Denny Hulme's No. 5 M8A Can-Am car. The work is not yet complete so any contributions to help finish the job would be most welcome. The trust then intends to restore the original McLaren service station's 1932 Austin 7 work truck that was used from 1945 to 1957 and on which young Bruce first learned to drive.

Many of you readers may not ever be so fortunate as to realize the dream that my wife and I have lived this week, but if there is ever the opportunity to visit the Bruce McLaren Trust we strongly suggest you do so. If the means for such a trip are not within your reality, a visit to their website, www.bruce-mclaren.com and enrollment as a trust member – or simply to make a donation - should certainly be a possibility. You can also email the trust directly at brucemclarentrust@clear.net.nz



As a teen, I wrote a fan letter to Bruce at his race shops and much to my delight I received two black and white autographed photographs of Bruce and Denny in their Formula One cars. I still have them over 40 plus years later - and the envelope they were sent in. Both photos hold a prominent place in my heart as reminders of what a great man he was and how, despite his many commitments, he cared enough to answer a fan letter from America. My thanks go out to Jan McLaren and the Bruce McLaren Trust for keeping his memory alive.





Down Under in 1966 with "Pop" McLaren

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