



# – part three • dennis the menace

In the final part of our feature on Dennis Marwood, we revisit the golden days of tin-top racing in New Zealand

By Gerard Richards

**After** several seasons of single-seater racing, Dennis was now well and truly over the call of the farm. However, with no driving prospects ahead he decided to take the plunge, and start an engine tuning and modifying speed shop. With Ray Stone, he formed Performance Development Services in Takanini and made the move from the family farm to Manurewa, in South Auckland.

Their timing couldn't have been better. Along with the burgeoning hot rodding and performance car scene, this period coincided perfectly with the opening of the Bay Park motor racing circuit.

The Bay of Plenty Motor Racing Association was formed by Ian Rorison, Feo Stanton, Graham Pierce, Peter Hanna and possibly a couple of other silent partners. If his memory serves him correctly, Dennis recalled Rorison was the only one amongst this group who made a financial contribution to the establishment of the Bay Park circuit. There were two other

contributors, but their names have faded from Dennis' memory with the passage of time.

The arrival of Bay Park in the resort area of Mt Maunganui brought a new and innovative approach to motor racing promotion. The land was leased and the building of the compact circuit was comparatively cheap, which allowed more money to be used to attract international feature drivers. This approach attracted big crowds at meetings, often run at holiday weekends. This didn't go down too well with the older, longer established circuits; it was tantamount to hanging a red rag in front of the old bulls.

The archaic way New Zealand's traditional circuits promoted their meetings and treated the local heroes, who were providing the spectacle, was ripe for change. At Pukekohe pit passes were handed out as if they were diamonds, and entry fees were astronomical. For the majority of the local stars, appearance money was virtually non-existent.

Bay Park changed all that – the drivers were

king, as were the spectators. The organisers realised that to attract good crowds, they needed to put on a good show. Great promotion delivered the attendance, and a big race programme with minimal delays completed the winning formula.

Some attempts to block the new upstarts were made by the old guard, who were not happy with the latest incumbents playing against their rules. As a result, a Gold Star race was not initially awarded to Bay Park, which probably didn't upset the circuit promoters hugely. They ran their own 'gold star' race anyway, in which a better than expected field showed up. Then, cheekily, they awarded the winner a cardboard gold star.

### Racing in the Bay

There was a hard-core passion for motor racing in 'the Bay' during the late '60s and '70s. Two titans emerged from this rich melting pot and combined their involvement with the circuit with the running of race cars in their names.

They were Feo Stanton, a Tauranga car dealer, >

01 Dennis (left) with Joe Wright preparing the Eisert-Chev F5000 during the winter of 1969 at Performance Developments (Photo by Jack Inwood, Dennis Marwood Collection)

02 Dennis in the big Eisert Chev, dubbed the 'Fat One' – Bay Park 1969/70 season (Photo Terry Marshall)



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NO.	DRIVER	TIME	POINTS	REMARKS
1	1920	1:20.00	17.5	5.275
2	1920	1:20.00	17.5	5.275
3	1920	1:20.00	17.5	5.275
4	1920	1:20.00	17.5	5.275

and Ian Rorison, a quarry owner and operator of a fleet of trucks. The two would form a partnership, combining their names to establish the Rorstan brand (Rorison Stanton).

A Brabham 2.5 Climax was acquired and, initially, the West Australian Formula 2 driver, Paul Bolton, was the main pilot during the 1967-'68 season. This came about as a result of Rorison's many mineral prospecting visits to Western Australia.

Marwood remembers Bolton as, "A high risk driver, fast but accident prone." This was certainly borne out when he lost control of the Brabham over the difficult loop corner at

the 1968 Wigram Tasman race. He burrowed the car right through the hangar wall on that occasion and was lucky to escape with only minor abrasions. Earlier in the season at Levin on November 25, 1967, Bolton hadn't been so lucky, inverting the car on himself and incurring a fractured collarbone and shoulder. He didn't return until the Grand Prix meeting at Pukekohe on January 6, 1968, at which he had a good race to secure fifth place.

On the return from his many excursions to Western Australia, Ian would call into Performance Developments on his way home to talk motor racing with Dennis and Ray. It was from these meetings that Dennis's prospect as a potential driver for the team arose. With Jimmy Palmer also a designated driver, the initial arrangement was for Dennis to act as back-up driver when the other two weren't available. With Palmer racing the McLaren and Bolton concluding his season with the Tasman races, Dennis had a couple of late season drives in the Brabham.

For the 1968/'69 season, Palmer was the nominated first choice driver, with Dennis as number two – Bolton was out of the picture this season. Stanton and Rorison decided to acquire a new car to run alongside the Brabham. They arranged with Sydney racing car designer, Bob

Britten, to build them a lightweight space-frame car that would become known as the Rorstan Climax 2.5.

It was around this time that Dennis scored his well-known nickname – 'Marbles' – courtesy of Feo Stanton and awarded for reasons that were never revealed.

### Rorstan Era

Armed with the new Rorstan for Palmer and the older Brabham for Marwood, both powered by long-stroke Climax motors, a full season was planned by the team. It was not to be a particularly rewarding campaign, the main culprit being the fragile and not very competitive Climax engines. Palmer's only engagement on tour was the first Gold Star race at Pukekohe in the older Brabham. The writing was on the wall for the multiple single-seater champion, this was not going to be a fruitful season. He took no further part in proceedings.

Dennis picked up a point in the second Gold Star at Bay Park, again in the old ex-Bolton car, but he and the other aging 2.5 Brabhams were no match for the hot new FVA-powered cars of Roly Levis and Graeme Lawrence. It was the only dent Dennis made on the scoreboard all summer.

He ran the Tasman Series races as far as Wigram, debuting the new Rorstan Climax

at Levin. Unfortunately, Dennis wasn't able to complete any of the events and finished the international campaign with yet another blown Climax mill at Wigram.

The only silver lining were two good late season runs in the Rorstan, both at Pukekohe. He chased Grahame McRae hard in the 10-lap Rothman's Trophy and briefly took the lead under brakes at the Lion Hairpin. On the second lap, McRae in his Brabham BT23 FVA took command. Dennis hung on and the car kept going to finish 13 seconds down on the quicker Brabham, and 10 seconds clear of Red Dawson who finished third.

At the March 30, 1969 Pukekohe meeting, Dennis recorded a rare win in the Rorstan Climax, taking out a combined sports and single-seater 10-lapper. This was an interesting race which included Geoff Mardon in the McBegg-Chev, Grahame Harvey in the Elfin-Chev plus the Boyd Stanton Corvette and a convoy of Climax and twin-cam-powered single-seaters.

Harvey led Marwood, Frank Radisich (HCM FVA) and David Oxtan at the outset, followed by Vince Anderson (Brabham Climax) and Jim Boyd. The yellow Begg spun on the first lap, but then Harvey and Marwood engaged in a fierce crowd-pleasing duel for four laps. The cars were evenly matched, and this spectacle enlivened proceedings until Dennis – pushing Harvey hard – got a bit close at Castrol and nudged the Elfin off. A suspension breakage on the big sports car ended the encounter. The Rorstan was going a treat on this occasion, and Dennis cleared out for an easy win from Oxtan and Radisich.

### Racing Legends

The Marwood post-NZIGP barbecue at his Manurewa homestead became a legendary feature of this era, and were attended by no less luminaries than Jim Clark, Bruce McLaren, Chris Amon, Jochen Rindt and Piers Courage. It seems the backyard antics were far more attractive than the stuffy official post-race celebrations. This was the regulation gathering for about four years, and Dennis has clear memories of the legendary Jim Clark on his phone, berating Lotus chief, Colin Chapman, in England. "He was rather upset



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with the valve springs breaking on the 2.5 DFV, having just lost the '68 NZIGP, and was letting Le Patron know in no uncertain terms."

No less a legend than the Williams Formula One commander, Sir Frank Williams, established his NZ business office at the Performance Development nerve centre during the 1969 Tasman Series campaign.

### Into F5000

This period marked the culmination of the Climax-powered frontline era. Feo Stanton would put Bryan Faloon in the car for the following season and, while devastatingly quick, the fragile Climax engines self-destructed at regular intervals.

Eventually Stanton fitted a flat-eight Porsche motor into the Rorstan during the F5000 era. This campaign tragically ended when Faloon died as a result of a high speed tangle with Graeme Lawrence's Lola T300 at the 1972 NZ Grand Prix.

Following the conclusion of the 1968/'69 season (which incidentally was the year that Rothman's brought in its blanket sponsorship of around six cars, with Team Lexington), Feo Stanton and Ian Rorison elected to dissolve their partnership and go their separate ways.

In the meantime, Rorison had acquired the heavy Eisert-Chev F5000 car. This had been originally bought to appear in the inaugural Formula A (F5000) feature race at the Bay Park Christmas meeting in December 1968. Stew MacMillan drove this car and led the race until lap 18, when suspension failure sent it into the fence.

As it was the quickest F5000 car at the meeting, Rorison decided to buy the Eisert-Chev in damaged condition. He had seen the writing on the wall for the future of the 2.5-litre class as the premium single-seater category. These old, pure racing engines were now out-dated, and a full field of Cosworth FVAs would have been prohibitively expensive. As well, international Grand Prix stars were no longer coming to New Zealand for 1970, so F5000 was the only way to go and, with the Eisert-Chev, Rorison was sure that his team would be ready.

Trouble was, the Eisert wasn't really a purpose-built road racer, it was a converted Indy oval track

car. The early F5000 cars from the US, where the category originated in 1967, were usually converted oval track machines. The Eisert was big and heavy with very marginal brakes – well, they didn't need them on the banked super speedways. Later, that would all change when the British racing teams invaded Indianapolis and seized control.

Dennis was contracted to drive the Eisert-Chev, but the first challenge was to repair the damage and then try and civilise the car's handling. Bay Park hadn't really been a test for the car and Dennis had very mixed feelings about utilising a stock-block V8 engine for racing purposes. He envisaged that the many weaknesses of the Chevrolet engine would surface under racing stresses.

During the winter of 1969, the Eisert was rebuilt. "We prepared the car at the Rorison Transport Depot, with the assistance of Joe Wright, who was then working at Performance Developments."

At that same time, Marwood's original partner, Ray Stone, decided to leave Performance Developments and form Superford. There he would be preparing Paul Fahey's Shelby Mustang, and also the new Alan Mann Escort FVA for the coming season.

After a nationwide advertising search, Dennis employed a young Dunedin mechanic/engineer to replace Stone – and the new man, Dick Bennetts, was to become a racing legend. Bennetts did some work on the Eisert, but his supreme skills came to the fore a little later while transforming Marwood's TransAm Camaro into a potent and winning race car.

Eventually there wasn't really a market in New Zealand for Bennetts' engineering race skills, and he left the country in 1973. Initially, he prepared the Begg FM5 for George Begg and David Oxtan when they took the car to campaign in the European F5000 series. He stayed on, later working for Bernie Ecclestone preparing the BMW Procars that the Grand Prix drivers used in that highly competitive series in conjunction with the Formula One races during 1979/'80.

Following that, Bennetts started his own F3 team in conjunction with a young Ron Dennis (a short time later to become the man behind McLaren International), and ran such legends such as Ayrton Senna, Martin Brundle and others.

These days, Bennetts is involved with engineering cars for the British Touring Car Championship. >

03 One of the tasks undertaken by Dennis' Performance Developments company was to shake down Begg FM2 for the Begg Team. Dennis is in the car, Fred McLean at the right, with driver Grahame Harvey far left. Pukekohe, late 1970 (Dennis Marwood Collection)

04 Dennis' original, type-written gear ratio table for the Colotti-Francis gearbox used in the Eisert-Chevrolet (Dennis Marwood Collection)

05 Dennis at speed in the Eisert-Chev (Photo by Jack Inwood, Dennis Marwood Collection)

### F5000 Debut

The Eisert-Chev was now primed and ready to go for the autumn Pukekohe Gold Star opener on September 21, 1969, though it almost hadn't been. What punters didn't know was that to avoid customs import tax, it had been necessary to take the car out of New Zealand. Rorison was forced to race the car overseas to avoid a penalty, but a shakedown run at a Warwick Farm meet in Australia the previous fortnight had seen the car involved in a shunt into the fence, which meant a rebuild of the car's front-end and suspension.

During testing prior to the Pukekohe race, the Eisert-Chev clocked in a 62.9-second lap which confirmed all was well, though Dennis could only manage 64.5 seconds in official practice, just behind Roly Levis on 64.2.

A slow start, with Dennis favouring the clutch, saw Roly take an early lead, although Dennis overwhelmed him on the back straight. Trying to outbrake Marwood, Levis outbraked himself and understeered to the outside edge of the hairpin. This forced Dennis off the track and he dropped to eighth place. He was now really pumped, and wound up the wick as he reeled in the field. He thundered past Henky Iriawan (Elfin 600), Frank Radisich (McLaren M4A), Graham Watson (Brabham) and had already posted a 62.2 fastest lap at an average of 100.3mph (161.4kph). Dennis took McRae's Begg FM2 on the next lap, and by the sixth lap was past Ken Smith's Lotus 41.

Dennis was really in the groove and out to nail Levis. By the ninth lap they were locked in battle. As Motorman put it, "The Eisert's big Chev engine was more than a match for the FVA as it roared to 7500rpm, and two laps later Marwood took a lead he never lost."

It was the high point for the Eisert, and a superb driving performance from Dennis. Ahead

lay the new arrival in NZ – Graeme Lawrence's ex-Chris Amon Dino Ferrari – and Graham McRae's McLaren M10A – two cars that the Eisert simply couldn't live with.

At the next round at Bay Park, Marwood salvaged a distant second to Lawrence's dominant Ferrari, nursing the car home with a suspected crown-wheel-and-pinion problem.

A blown engine in practice for the November 16 Bay Park Gold Star round curtailed the rest of Marwood's national championship series campaign, as the spare motor was still under construction. McRae won here and was starting to exert his dominance.

During the Tasman Series, the Levin opener brought a satisfying result for Dennis and Ian. Apart from the handling and braking deficiencies of the car, they were also contending with a cracked cylinder head. Dennis, "The budget didn't allow for replacement of the cylinder heads."

This was causing the temperature gauge to climb in the race, until Dennis uncovered a way to drive around it. In his words, "By short shifting at 4500 to 5000rpm, but shifting fast I was able to keep the temperature down and maintain my speed. After a battle with Frank Radisich for a few laps, I got through and eventually found myself hounding Ulf Norinder in fifth place. Pressuring him hard for five laps, the Swedish playboy racer capitulated and waved me through. Afterwards he nicknamed me 'Tiger' – it was very satisfying to adapt to the limits of the equipment and get that fifth place result, Ian and I were very happy with that."

The Eisert was certainly past its use-by date by the end of the international race series, and retired from the rest of the races with a variety of problems, including the gearbox, flooded carbs after a spin, and a weak clutch. The car

was no longer competitive. Its handicaps had been exposed – excess weight, poor handling and braking in comparison to the new breed of F5000 car.

The Eisert-Chev was duly retired and has since returned to the US where, by all accounts, it has been restored to its original USAC oval track racing form.

Ian Rorison, however, had no plans to retire as a race car owner, and this was great news for Dennis. Rorison decided to finish with single-seaters though and Marwood, now 37, probably wasn't too distraught about that decision.

### Big Bangers

By the early '70s, Bay Park was all about big saloon racing – this was now the racing category that electrified the crowds. A full field of big-banger V8s really did make the earth move.

For the December 1970 Christmas meeting, Bay Park management imported three overseas stars – all in Chevrolet Camaros – to take on the local heroes. One of these was Joe Chamberlain in a genuine, factory built 1969 TransAm car. He was joined by two Australians, Bryan Thompson and Terry Allan, in earlier model Camaros. The visitors had to contend with Paul Fahey's new, lightning fast 1970 Boss Mustang and Rod Coppins' Camaro.

It was an extremely wild and volatile fender-bending, panel crunching display – and the crowd loved it.

Chamberlain engaged in a rough-house duel with ex-stock car racer Johnny Riley, who wielded his ex-Fahey Shelby Mustang in dirt track fashion. By the end of the day Riley's metallic green Mustang was almost reduced to rubble, with barely a single straight panel remaining. The Chamberlain car also earned some serious battle scars – including a crushed

wheel arch which caused the rear tyre to rub against the bodywork. This didn't stop the man from Portland, Oregon, who left a trail of acrid tyre smoke the length of the circuit.

Obviously impressed with Chamberlain's on-track antics in the TransAm Camaro, Rorison made an offer for the orange beast and quickly became its new owner. Dennis would be the driver and the team immediately got stuck in, straightening the Camaro out and turning out in the thick of the season.

The Camaro's problem at Bay Park – and for much of the 1970/71 season – was down to its mild, restricted TransAm level modifications. A single four-barrel carburettor and narrow wheels put it at a disadvantage against the multi-Weber, wider wheel set-ups on most of the Kiwi and Australian big-bangers.

Joe Chamberlain was a bit of a journeyman privateer racer, largely running in just the West Coast TransAm races. His best results in the car were a ninth place at the opening 1970 Laguna Seca TransAm meeting and couple of 11th places at Mission Bell, Riverside and the Kent 300 at Seattle in September 1969.

### Breathing Fire into the Camaro

Taking on the Camaro in the meat of the current 1970/71 season, there was little time to make any major improvements. With racing on literally every weekend, Rorison's team tidied up the car after the Bay Park 'demolition derby' and set out on the racing trail. With Ross Phillips coming on board, they fitted dual four-barrel carburettors to the Camaro's 4998cc (305ci) V8, fitted larger ten-inch-wide rims, and headed out to the race track.

During the first season the car was maintained from Rorison's Tauranga-based trucking headquarters. Alas, proceedings were delayed when it needing to be re-exported to Australia so the team could navigate around New Zealand's archaic import licensing laws.

Dennis stayed with Brian Foley in Sydney in



06 Dennis and the Eisert-Chev F5000 at the Bay Park, October 1969 Gold Star meeting – on their way to second place behind Lawrence's Ferrari Dino (Photo Gerard Richards)

07 TransAm Camaro lifting a front wheel over a bump at Wigram, with Jim Richards' fast Willment Twin Cam Escort in pursuit. Note the long distance TransAm racing lights are still mounted to the car's roll-cage. This was Dennis' debut in the Camaro, Wigram 1971 (Photo by Jack Inwood, Dennis Marwood Collection)

08 Dennis in the Custom Card Camaro leads Paul Fahey's Escort FVC at Levin, early 1971 (Photo by Jack Inwood, Dennis Marwood Collection)

09 Original promotional sticker for Performance Developments – illustrating the Chevrolet Camaro (Dennis Marwood Collection)

10 The mighty TransAm Camaro on full song during the Saloon Championship race at Bay Park – April 2nd, 1972. Dennis buried the field to record two runaway wins (Dennis Marwood Collection)

early 1971 during this enforced overseas trip, running the Camaro at Warwick Farm. Later, this would become a regular overseas jaunt for Dennis. "Brian bet me a bottle of champagne that I couldn't do an under a one minute, 44-second lap around the Farm in it. I managed 1.44-something, so was close, but Foley in his Alfa Romeo and the top Aussies were doing one minute-42, so it was a bit of a wake-up call. Paul [Fahey] ran his Escort at that meeting and was faster than me, also giving the Aussies a fright in the first race. Then they ruled out his car on some trumped up, laminated windscreen infringement. Unbelievable, but a not exactly surprising Ocker tactic when they're under threat."

During the latter races of the season in early 1971, the team went through a big learning curve with the Camaro.

Dennis didn't debut the ex-Chamberlain car in New Zealand until the Wigram saloon championship round at the international meeting. It was a case of steadily improving the car from its regulated TransAm form in these early races. Getting the handling and braking sorted out was a major challenge as these cars, as raced in the American series, had a reputation for not being set up for fierce cornering. By the final races of the season, Marwood was coming to terms with the front-runners – Paul Fahey, Rod Coppins, Jim Palmer (that man again, this time in the

ex-Foley Porsche 911), Jack Nazer (Escort FVA) and, occasionally, the phenomenally fast Jim Richards (Escort Twin-Cam).

At the 1971 Easter Bay Park Meeting, Dennis took a couple of good wins over Palmer, Nazer and Dawson (Shelby Mustang).

I remember also witnessing a great battle, between Red and Dennis in the second heat of the saloon championship round at Pukekohe on March 14, 1971. Dawson made one of his blinding anticipatory starts to head the field, with Marwood pouring on the coals to hound him into Champion Curve. Then it was all on, in one of the best, heavy metal gladiatorial duels on Pukekohe for years.

On lap two, they thundered down pit straight side-by-side with the crowd now well and truly on its feet, sensing an epic battle was taking place. Dennis just managed to slip through on the inside of Champion Curve with a true, white-knuckle manoeuvre to take the lead. But Dawson, with the bit firmly between his teeth, was not relinquishing the front without a fight. He wrested the lead back from Marwood on the fifth lap, to a huge roar of delight from the crowd – Red had long been a perennial favourite with the punters due to his diehard driving style. Marwood closed right back onto the bumper of Dawson's Mustang and it looked as if it would be a grandstand finish. Going into the final lap, Dennis was on the ragged edge as





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he again forced his way through on the inside of Champion Curve. Putting two wheels in the dirt, in a desperado move he retook the lead. Neck-and-neck over Rothmans, Dennis held on by nine-tenths of a second to win one of the most thrilling races I have ever seen.

### Winning Ways

For the vintage, second season with the mighty orange Camaro, Dennis took up an option to lease the car from Rorison. He moved the base of operations to his Performance Developments compound in Takanini. It was now that Dick Bennetts gained full reign in rebuilding the car.

In Dennis's words, "We knew that Allan Moffat was coming and had developed his Coke TransAm Mustang with bigger wheels and huge rear tyres. From our experience at Warwick Farm, we knew we had to improve the car."

Dick Bennetts crafted a demon 5735cc (350ci) engine with all the good gear and fitted it with a battery of 48IDA Webers. Larger wheels were also fitted inside beautifully flared guards and the suspension was further refined. With Radio 1 sponsorship the car looked a picture, and was the quickest Kiwi big-banger of the new season.

The story of the 1971/72 Bank of New South Wales Championship trail was a case of missed opportunities for Marwood's fledgling Devlo Racing Team.

At the Grand Prix meeting, Dennis was only out-qualified by Allan Moffat in his superbly-handling Coke Mustang on one minute, 7.3 seconds. Marwood was next on one minute 8.6, with the Camaro going beautifully and well ahead of the other locals. "The saloon record had been around one minute, 10 seconds for a couple of years and no one seemed able to get below this mark – so this was a huge improvement."

Dennis recalled, "Moffat had a slow puncture on the dummy grid and they only changed it in time for him to start at the rear of the grid. I was alone on the front row, got a good start and was going well up front. Then the car developed severe axle tramp going into Railway Corner (Castrol) as a result of the brake bias being too much in favour of the rear. We were still learning about this and experimenting, but eventually I lost control, spinning harmlessly to the tail of the field. Moffat went on and won, which didn't

reflect well on the rest of us, but I did have the situation under control until then."

Paul Fahey won the championship points for coming home second, as he did at Teretonga which Marwood also led at one stage. On this occasion, Fahey misjudged his braking at the loop, hitting the back of the Camaro and sending Marwood off into the infield lupins.

It was another lost race – and more points to Fahey's championship-winning total. Dennis protested fairly here. Paul's response was that he misjudged his braking distance due to brain fade, still relating to the stopping distances he had learned racing his Escort. This was upheld by the stewards.

Marwood's later protest against Fahey at the Grand Prix round – urged on by another competitor – after he was passed by Fahey while spinning off the track, was not such an inspired call. "I regretted doing that afterwards, I was influenced by a driver who had an axe to grind against Paul. It was stupid really, how can someone be passing me under a yellow flag, while I was spinning off the track, another case of me listening unwisely to others. It was dropped, of course, and Paul called me Mister 20 bucks for awhile after that with good reason!"

Following a mid season slump, when the Camaro's big engine needed to be rebuilt and the 305 mill refitted, Marwood finished the season with two emphatic runaway wins. Unfortunately, it was too late to recover lost ground. With the big motor back in, Dennis destroyed the field at Bay Park at the April 2, 1972 Saloon Championship round. Qualifying in second slot behind Fahey on 62.9 seconds, he got the jump in both races and wasn't headed. Fahey and Coppins filled the other positions in both heats.

Marwood continued this form into the season finale – this was the last occasion the long loop circuit was used at Pukekohe, April 9th, 1972. Again he had the legs on the field and cleared out for two impressive wins. The only interest in the first heat was a real grudge battle between Dawson and Fahey, though neither cars were running well at this late stage of the season (both were running milder engines with their top units out of commission). They eventually tangled, with both cars leaving the circuit amid

an inevitable steward's enquiry.

The second heat saw Dennis romp home again over a depleted field, ahead of Don Halliday's Escort BDA and Johnny Riley's evergreen Mustang. Thundering around the circuit the car was thrilling to watch, the handling superb and the Dick Bennetts-built Chev V8 delivering awesome power. It was a high-water mark of New Zealand's fabulous pony car racing era.

### ANZAC Encounter

During the New Zealand winter of 1972, Bob Jane arranged a New Zealand versus Australia big saloon match over two meets. The initial encounter was a severe embarrassment, with all the Kiwi cars retiring at Calder. Fahey blew the PDL Mustang motor in practice and took no further part, while the Coppins Firebird blew a head gasket as well, taking no further part in that meeting. Dennis retired with clutch failure in the race, so it was a complete Aussie rout!

"We weren't really prepared, coming out of our winter for this first meeting. The idea by Jane was thought up quickly and we hadn't had a chance to properly prepare our cars."

Both Dennis and Rod's cars were repaired for the second round Warwick Farm meeting. Paul Fahey drove Bob Jane's Camaro, while Jane raced his super fast, Repco V8-powered LC Torana. Marwood did much better this time, holding out Jane for several laps before finishing a good second.



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- 11 The final racing version of the Chamberlain/Marwood/Riley Camaro – seen here in the pits at the 1975 NZGP meeting. Riley was in his last few races in the Camaro (Photo Gerard Richards)
- 12 At the wet Benson & Hedges race in 1973 at Pukekohe Dennis came home second in the 'up to 1200cc' category in his Datsun (Photo by Jack Inwood, Dennis Marwood Collection)
- 13 End of an era – Dennis drifts his mean Chev through the loop at Pukekohe during the last time the long circuit was used except for endurance racing – April 9th, 1972 (Dennis Marwood Collection)
- 14 Early classic racing days with Dennis and Alfa at Taupo, early '80s (Photo by Stew Wood, Dennis Marwood Collection)
- 15 Original Datsun brochure for the Datsun 1200SSS (Courtesy Les Cook)
- 16 Pete Kerr with Alan Jones Alan Rees' wife and on his left Alan Jones' wife. Monaco 1977 (Dennis Marwood Collection)
- 17 Dick Bennetts with Patrick Tambay, Pau 1977 (Dennis Marwood Collection)



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### The Camaro's Final Season

For the 1972/73 season, Dennis raced the Camaro in the early meetings but less effort went into preparing the car. One again, the machine needed re-exporting and Rorison had pretty much decided to sell the Camaro. "Ian wanted \$20,000 for it and in hindsight it wasn't unreasonable and I should have bought it. It would certainly be great to have it now!"

Marwood last raced the Camaro at the December 31, 1972 International Saloon Meeting. Fourth and fifth places were the best he could manage here. At the previous October 22, 1972 meet, just after the car had been re-imported (again), he qualified fastest. This was the meeting at which Australian Mal Ramsey appeared in his F5000 Repco-powered Kingswood. But Dennis had to give best to Coppins' Pontiac Firebird TransAm (ex-Ron Grable) which was just hitting its stride. Development work on the Camaro had pretty much wound up by mid-season, and the car was eventually sold to Johnny Riley, who raced it for several seasons. After that, the Camaro was carved up a bit to try and keep it competitive and ended up looking quite rough. An attempt at space-framing the front-end by a so-called expert effectively ruined the car's handling.

The Camaro ended up being sold as a road hack. I spied it one day trundling through the main drag in Mt Wellington, Auckland, during the early '80s with a crowd of hoons aboard, and it looked to be heading towards a tragic demise.

Fortunately, it was rescued shortly afterwards by Tony Antonievich, son of one of legendary members of the victorious NZ 1958 Stock Team to Australia. Over a period of 20 years or so, Tony lovingly restored this wonderful and genuine TransAm pony car. Wisely, he returned it to the original TransAm racing specs, with the same paint scheme and sign-writing it had carried when Joe Chamberlain first arrived in this country in December 1970.

### Car Dealing & Classic Car Racing

By the mid '70s, Dennis had decided to run Performance Developments in conjunction with car dealing. He had been offered a Datsun agency – the Marwood Datsun SSS Centre – and moved into selling cars. For several years he raced Datsuns in the smaller capacity Group 3 Castrol GTX production racing series, through 1973-1977. With Jimmy Stone – of later Aussie Supercar fame – working at Performance Development along with Grant Walker, they developed what became known as the performance SSS package on the Datsun.

Modified manifolds and cams were linked to twin Dell'orto side-draught carburetors to produce a little dynamo of a hot machine. Dennis enjoyed much success with boxy



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1200 SSS Datsun, and later with the 120Y SSS in production car racing and at the Benson & Hedges endurance races.

During their limited production runs, Performance Developments built around 800 1200 SSS models and around 120 120Y SSS models.

However, in his own words, "I failed to fully grasp the opportunity of the Datsun dealership. I didn't enjoy selling cars, I found it difficult not to tell any prospective buyers of any faults I knew the cars had. That didn't sit well with me."

He further reflected on how the undermining of his confidence by his father's constant criticisms had played out in his life. "I used to try and compensate for this inferiority complex I

had and it upset many people. I could be cheeky and scatter-brained at times, and also a bit rude and impetuous. It took me a long time to reconcile these aspects with myself. When my boy, Grant, and I became closer after I stopped repeating some of the things my dad did to me, I mellowed. I now appreciate the truly good things in life, like great racing mates and close family."

Speaking of his son Grant (a skilled fitter and turner/engineer), he proudly talks of his two years working with Eddie Jordan's Formula One team. Grant also worked on the Aussie V8 Supercar teams of the Stone brothers and Paul Morris. These days Grant is involved in working for the company which markets Mazak CNC >



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## Memories of Ian Rorison

By Dennis Marwood

My memories of Ian Rorison are many and all good. About 1968 the Rothmans Sports Foundation had sold the old Cooper Climax and so I was a free agent. Ian was a frequent visitor to Performance Developments at Takanini to talk motor racing. Being one of the three people involved setting up Bay Park Raceway, he was always arranging cars and drivers to run at their Summer meetings, and in partnership with Jim Stanton, the Rorstan name was started with Jim Palmer, Paul Bolton and myself driving both the Brabham Climax and the Bob Brittan (Sydney) built Rorstan Climax.

In those days Ian would call in on his return from many visits to Western Australia, where he was very interested in the mining opportunities there and would talk about how big the area was, and how far he had to travel to see where the Prospecting Licence boundaries were and for collecting samples for testing etc.

Mining is in the Rorison family blood. Ian had found a seam of lime/ phosphate near Te Kuiti well before I first knew him, he operated a fleet of truck and trailer units delivering this product and his family home was only a few metres from the eastern end of Bay Park track. Now, all these years later, with Ian having passed away in 1984, his son Gary carried on with the quarry business until his untimely death only five years ago. Today, the quarry is in the hands of the third generation of the Rorison family, Mike.

I always found Ian to be generous and with a kind disposition, over a five year period he asked me to drive three or four of his cars so I was always grateful for that. I was never one to seriously chase championships by asking for new tyres or a new engine, because we knew the one in the car had cracked cylinder heads, so doing the best job with what you had been given was all I was happy to deal with.

A case in point – at the Levin Tasman Meeting (January 1970), I qualified the Eisert-Chev on the fifth row with no hope of any decent placing as everyone knew this car was an Indianapolis oval car and no way could it match the pukka F5000 cars, especially around Levin for 50 laps. However, a few laps into the race I soon found that the cylinder heads were cracked and if I used the usual 7000rpm the water temperature went to the top – so, by short shifting at 4500 to 5000 rpm, I managed to keep the gauge in order and after a short battle with Frank Radisich I found myself in sixth behind Ulf Noranger, who I followed for several laps before he finally waved me by into fifth. The moral of this tale is that it can be satisfying doing the best with what you have, and both Ian and I were happy to get that result.

Ian left behind two great legacies – his mining operation and the ex-Joe Chamberlain Camaro, now owned by Tony Antonievich.



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machines. He services these highly specialised and expensive robot-operated manufacturing systems.

Dennis returned to the track during the late '80s racing a variety of his favourite Alfa Romeo saloons, running in the Classic Saloon Category. He immensely enjoyed this period of fun racing, and made many lasting friendships. However, for Dennis it all ended on a wet day at Manfeild in 2004 when he was caught out without his correct glasses and misjudged rivulets of water running across the track. He wiped out both ends of his car, though fortunately he emerged uninjured. That morning he had already been considering that it was time to retire from racing – after that meeting the decision was sealed.

Today, Dennis enjoys a great life with his wife, Jill, living in the rural surrounds near Goat Island (Matakana). He sold Performance Developments a number of years ago and divides his time between family/friends and his Auckland-based performance parts business – Autoquip. Passionate about Italian performance equipment, Dennis focuses on selling high quality parts like Dell'orto carburettors,

Sportline steering wheels and Sabelt seats and racing harnesses. This keeps him busy and lets him remain in touch with the racing fraternity, while allowing him to spend time with his family and grandchildren.

We salute a real grass-roots racer and a wonderful legend from those iconic, raw and dangerous days of New Zealand's rich racing heritage. 🍷

18 Dennis in the pits at Taupo, April 1992, alongside his Alfa Romeo GTV (Photo Donn White)

19 Dennis with his first classic racing Alfa, Wigram Country Gents late '80s (Dennis Marwood Collection)

20 Dennis at the wheel of his classic racing Alfetta (#116) at Ruapuna in the early days of the new millennium (Dennis Marwood Collection)

21 NZ Tasman Series racing driver at MNZ 50th Anniversary Dinner, from left: John Riley, Roly Levis, Jim Murdoch, Dennis Marwood, Max Moseley, Ken Smith, Graham McRae, Graeme Lawrence, Frank Radisich and David Oxtan (Photo Geoff Ridder, Dennis Marwood Collection)

22 NZ single-seater racing greats – top row, from left: Ken Smith, Chris Amon, Roly Levis, David Oxtan and Jim Palmer. Bottom row, from left: Roly Crowther, Ross Greenville, Kerry Grant, Ross Jensen and Dennis Marwood (Dennis Marwood Collection)

23 The Marwood Camaro as it is today (Photo Gerard Richards)

24 Dennis as he is today – seen here in his trophy room (Photo Gerard Richards)

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## Dennis Marwood's Favourite Things

**FAVOURITE DRIVER:** Michael Schumacher – not by a country mile but a worldwide mile.

**FAVOURITE F1 TEAM:** Ferrari – because it is the only complete team.

**FAVOURITE KIWI DRIVER:** Jim Richards, he is an ex-pat, so I have a favourite resident

driver in John McIntyre. These drivers get 10 out of 10 from me. Greg Murphy gets 10 out of 10 for tipping Ambrose into the wall four years ago at Bathurst.

**FAVOURITE MARQUEE:** Alfa Romeo.

**PET HATE:** Rolling starts, reverse grids and handicap races. All are nonsense to me.