

Manawatu Car Club Presidents Report – October 2019 – September 2020

The Manawatu Car Club's 2020 Year was a year of learning, growth, teamwork and change...

I joked recently that my Presidents Report could be quite short in that I could just say that the Manawatu Car Club's Year was one best left consigned to the history books and we should just move on, but when you look at our year it was indeed one of the best years for the club in that it was a year of learning, personal growth, great teamwork and inevitable change.

While the Motorsport scene was disrupted right around the world, it was us Kiwi's that seemed to adapt to these changes and challenges the best and we came out on top more often than not. After placing 4th in the 2019 Indy Car Championship, Scott Dixon secured his 6th Indy Car title in 2020, notching up his 50th win in the class along the way which now sees him as the third most successful driver in American Championship Car racing history behind A.J. Foyt and Mario Andretti. Another Scott, this time McLaughlin, completed a three-peat of the V8 Supercars title taking out the 2020 championship with 13 race wins out of a revised 27 race program. The multi-talented Shane Van Gisbergen took out the 2020 Bathurst 1000. MCC Member Fabian Coulthard had a difficult 2020 V8 Supercars season finishing 6th overall, the highlights of the season being a race victory at Tailem Bend along with three other podium placings at Sydney, Darwin and again at Tailem Bend, along with a 4th placing at Bathurst. Another MCC Member, Chris Pither, started the 2020 year out as the TRS Driver Standards Advisor. In February he joined V8 Supercars Team Sydney for the 2020 Championship and while he had, by his own admission, results below his own personal expectations, he did finish up 20th overall in the series and secured a great 5th place at Darwin. Our most recognised MCC Member Brendon Hartley was extremely busy throughout the 2019/20 year, driving for Gazoo Racing Toyota in the World Endurance Championship, being a simulator driver for Ferrari and a Formula-E driver for team GEO-X Dragon. While Covid saw Brendon take a forced hiatus for a few months, and July saw him walk away from the GEO-X Dragon team drive, the highlights were undoubtedly his induction into the FIA Hall of Fame, a World Endurance Championship win at Fuji, and his second overall victory at the 24hrs Le Mans race in September 2020.

On the home front MCC Members Callum Crawley and Kaleb Ngatoa finished 2nd and 7th respectively in a shortened Formula Ford National Championship. Kaleb also competed in the Toyota 86 Championship finishing 7th in that series also. MCC Member Justin Allen also competed in the Toyota 86 Championship finishing in a hard-fought 13th place overall.

March 2020 saw New Zealand, and indeed the rest of the world, move into unprecedented times when Covid-19 hit our shores. NZ was placed in lockdown and the world as we knew it changed forever. During times of adversity like these, you have two options, you can either bury your head in the sand and hope that it will all go away, or you can lead from the front. I am pleased to say that your MCC Committee led from the front, and as President I could not have been prouder of them all. Very quickly meetings took place between Jeff, Tim and myself and we gathered all of the information that we could. Zoom Meetings were then arranged with the rest of the committee, and from there plans were put in place. Our 2020 strategic plan was reviewed and as we were unaware of just how long lockdown would actually run for, all of the "what if's" were covered off and a plan was put in place for each. Obviously many projects were put on hold, to spend money in a time when future revenue was unknown would have been foolish. Ultimately Covid restrictions would see the cancellation of the last round of the Mitre 10 Mega 2019/20 Summer Series, a couple of Drift Events and GT Oil / Transpec Manfeild Open Days, as well as a couple of third-party events that the MCC has the privilege of running. We also had to postpone the Summer Series and Winter Series Prizegiving's.

During the lockdown period I received an email from one of our long-time MCC Members and Sponsors, Johnathan Hogg, which I believe sums up our club, it read; "I am certainly missing the social aspect of the racing, it has made me realise that going around the track is only very small part of what we do, being with our family and likeminded people at the track is what it is about". I could not have put it better myself.

Luckily on the 13th of May 2020 NZ moved to Alert Level 2 and we were immediately able to announce, given the prior planning, that we would be running the first round of the 2020 Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series on the 6th / 7th June under Alert Level 2 guidelines, which saw us split the grids and run a two-day meeting.

Obviously Covid has had an impact on the club, but while we have reported an operating loss, we have generated a small cash surplus for the year and we are still in a very financially sound position, solely due to the astute management of the club. There will obviously be more detail on this in the Financial Report.

As for the numbers of entries and memberships for the year, well the 2019/20 Mitre 10 Mega Summer Series saw 177 entries for the first three rounds, which in itself was a record, had we have been able to hold the fourth round in April I am sure we would have seen over 250 entries for this series which was the target we had set ourselves. On the back of a brilliant OctoberFast Meeting we were able to reward our MCC Members with a \$100 entry to the first round of the Summer Series in December.

The first two rounds of the 2020 Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series did suffer from the Covid hangover, but the last two rounds bounced back with a vengeance, especially the final round which was also run under Level 2 restrictions, where we had 129 entries. Over the four rounds there were 414 entries in total which is only the third time we have had more than four hundred entries over a Winter Series. So, while down on the 2019 series where we had 454 entries, it was still an outstanding result given the circumstances.

The 2019 OctoberFast and 2020 February Flat Foot events are two-day meetings where we host IRC and HRC sanctioned series classes as well as other invited classes. The OctoberFast event had a record 194 entries, which was over 14 categories, who raced over a 37-race program over the two days. The number of entries was up on the previous best by some 36 entries which was a truly great start to our 2019/20 year. Unfortunately, our February Flat Foot meeting was again down on numbers for the second year in a row, with just 137 entries, this unfortunately undid all of the record setting of our OctoberFast Meeting.

2020 saw the resurrection of our Drift Program. It was unfortunate that a couple of drift events were impacted by Covid as the drift community had been champing at the bit to get back on the track and make up for the lost time that we had in 2018/19. Sadly, we did not run our ShowVember event in 2019 due to circumstances outside of our control, running a Drift Practice event instead, however all of the drift events held in the 2019/20 year were fully subscribed within hours of being posted on Facebook. Drifting is a huge part of our club now and the professionalism in and around the sport has come a long way over the past few years thanks to the organisers who run these events for us, in particular Jodie Bell. The number of drift events is set to grow substantially in the coming year.

Long-time supporters of motorsport, GT Oil and Transpec Services Ltd returned as sponsors for our entry level events which incorporated the Manfeild Open Days (Track Day Series), a Bent Sprint and a Covid Catch-Up Sealed Autocross. Due to Covid a couple of these events had to be cancelled throughout the year, but the six events that did go ahead were well supported with 176 entries which was massively up on the 114 entries from the year before.

The 2020 NZGP was an outstandingly well-run event where we once again showed the rest of the country what we can do. The feedback from the MSNZ Officials during and after the event praised our team for running a relaxed, professional and well organised event that once again ran like clockwork.

Our off-track events saw us run two Virtual Trials during lockdown, these were a lot of fun and saw many of the teams get very creative within their bubbles with regards to their set-ups on the nights of the trials. 16 teams entered the first trial with 20 entering the following event. We also had the first in the series of what we are calling "A Night with...". For the first event it was Tim Gibbes who graced the stage at the clubrooms and kept the 90 people who attended fully enthralled for well over two hours with some great stories and photos. There are more of these nights planned for the coming year.

Our MCC Membership declined for the first time in many years in the 2019/20 year, however the total of 409 members was still a great number and was the fourth year in a row that we have had over 400 members in the club. Our Manawatu Car Club Facebook page now has over 5,200 followers, up by some 1,500 followers in the past 12 months which is an amazing result and a testament to the great content that is posted on our page.

Other notable mentions from the year were that our own Shayne Harris was appointed to the Manfeild Park Trust Board in August 2020, Shayne's wealth of knowledge and experience will be a huge asset to Manfeild for many years to come. In July 2020 the MCC Committee unanimously voted to support the 2020 SpeedSport Scholarship run by Sabre Motorsports Dennis Martin. The 21st running of the SpeedSport Scholarship was under serious threat of cancellation following the Covid lockdown as key sponsors were no longer able to commit to funding support, so the

MCC stepped in to help Dennis out. Dennis has always supported the Manawatu Car Club, so it was an absolute no-brainer for us to return that loyalty. Being able to be in the position to contribute to the great work that Dennis and his team does was one of my highlights of the year.

All of the newly designed Flagpoints were finished in 2020 and are in readiness to be put in place around the circuit in the next couple of months. This has been a huge project and a massive amount of thanks must go out to Ernie from Ernie's Engineering in New Plymouth who donated these Flagpoints to the club so that our volunteers could have some of the best Flagpoints in the country.

Speaking of our volunteers, what can I say about our V-Force Team... You guys and girls continue to amaze me with your skill, professional approach, dedication to, and support of our sport. I cannot thank you enough for what you do for our club and our sport. Rest assured that we are working closely with MSNZ to make sure that you get more of the recognition that you so richly deserve. You are the lifeblood of our sport and we are ever indebted to you, for what you do to allow us to go racing.

Likewise, our sponsors are a huge part of the MCC Family. 2020 was a tough year and rather than put our sponsors in a position of having to feel like they had to sponsor us in these trying times, the MCC Committee made the call to forego all sponsorship for the 2020 year all the while letting the sponsors retain their naming rights. Going by the number of calls and emails I received from our family of sponsors this was the correct decision to make and I applaud the MCC Committee for making this call. I cannot thank our sponsors enough for what they do for us, they all can see the vision of what we are trying to create here, and they are more than willing to help us achieve that vision.

I would also like to take this time to thank Kathy and the rest of the team at Manfeild and also the Manfeild Park Trust Board. Given that Covid not only impacted MCC Events but also many other events that are hosted at Manfeild Park, Kathy and her team did a great job of keeping everyone in the loop about what was happening with the park during that period and they worked with us and did everything possible to help us get back on track, and onto the track, as quickly as we possibly could. Our communication continues to be frequent as well as being fiercely open and honest.

I would like to finish by saying thank you, although I feel that the words "thank you" do not really express the gratitude that I really feel... but to those members of the MCC Family that make this the great club that it is - our awesome volunteers, sponsors, and those people that share in our events, I say thank you. To the MCC Committee and Advisors to the club, it has been an absolute pleasure to have worked alongside you this year, you have all contributed hugely over the past year and I cannot thank you enough. Lastly to Jeff Braid, Trevor Weir and Russell Harris, I really wish that I could clone you three... Trevor and Russell thank you for the extensive amount of work you both put into the monthly MCC Magazine, everyone knows that communication is the key to every success in life and you two are the pinnacle of this for the club. Jeff, every time I arrive at a race meeting, committee meeting, any other MCC event for that matter, I think to myself that this club is truly lucky to have you. You are absolutely brilliant at what you do, and you do not get thanked enough for the role that you play in this club, my friend I salute you.

There are times in everyone's life where you come to a crossroads, when decisions have to be made that mean you either go one way or the other, these are commonly referred to as "turning points". It is my belief that the Manawatu Car Club is going to face a couple of turning points in the coming year ahead. What we have to remember here is that to stay ahead you must continue to move forward, to do nothing will see you quickly fall behind.

I am looking forward to a very positive 2021 year ahead...

Richie Arber
President
Manawatu Car Club Inc