

Manawatu Car Club Presidents Report – October 2021 – September 2022

The Manawatu Car Club's 2022 Year was a year focused on celebrating the club's 75 years of existence...

The usual format of a Presidents Report is to report on the events of the year, and then to thank those people that made it happen, however this year was one of the biggest years the club has had, so I would like to start my report by firstly thanking the 2022 MCC Committee, our Club Patrons Russell Harris and Brian Davies, and in particular the 75th Anniversary Committee. There was an absolutely huge amount of detailed planning that went into organising the 75th year of the MCC and without these people putting the amount of time and effort into this year that they did, it would not have been the success that it was, so I would like to say thank you, thank you all for stepping up to a whole new level, and thank you for the time, the energy, and the passion that you put into organising the events and celebrations that made the 75th year of the MCC one that will be remembered, and talked about, for many years to come.

This year wasn't an easy road to navigate I can tell you, the start of 2022 financial year was filled with many obstacles, largely due to the ongoing COVID restrictions which saw us having to run the last round of the '21 Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series, which was destined to be at the start of September, in mid-October, where it had to be a two-day event due to the rules in place at the time. Those rules also saw us having to cancel both our '21 OctoberFast and '22 February Flatfoot meetings due to the Waikato and Auckland regions being in lockdown, as around 60% of our entries for those meetings came from those two regions. Covid also impacted our ShowVember '21 meeting with reduced entries and a lack of a meeting sponsor, as well as the first two rounds of the Mitre 10 Mega Summer Race Series, and when we add to this no Speedworks round at Manfeild at the start of 2022 I can say that financially the first 4 – 5 months of the '22 year were not looking flash at all.

However, there were a couple of shining lights throughout those tough months, and they were the delayed 2021 Winter Series Prizegiving that was held in December '21 at the great venue that is the Coach House Museum. I remember Russell Harris and I talking about bringing some fun to that night so that we could all have a much-needed laugh, moments later we rode in on our electric scooters... and in January '22 something truly awesome happened, a project which has been a long time in the making had finally come to fruition...yes, I am talking about the Flag-points on Manfeild: Circuit Chris Amon being replaced. Over a two-week period from the 10th January '22, SMB Builders took down all of the old Flag-points, they then boxed and poured all new concrete floors and put in place the new Flag-points that had been pre-built before Christmas. I would like to again say a huge thank you to Ernie from Ernie's Engineering in New Plymouth for making all of the new Flag-points, also to John Hickman from JD Hickman Transport Ltd for getting them down from New Plymouth to Manfeild for us. Thank you also to the Manfeild Park Trust for helping us raise most of the funds needed to have these installed. And lastly thank you to Simon Barry and his team from SMB Builders for putting in a massive effort to get these put in place in just a two-week period. We now have the best Flag Points in New Zealand, and without a doubt they were worth every bit of the \$14k that the club invested into them to make sure that our Flag Marshalls are protected year-round, no matter what the weather.

We started to climb out of the COVID slump in March & April '22... with the cancellation of the Central District Field Days in March we quickly added a Drift Practice event and another round of our ever increasingly popular Manfeild Open Days which were once again sponsored by long time grassroots motorsport sponsors GT Oil and Transpec Services Ltd. With the adding of these two events, we now had an on-track event organised for every month of the '22 financial year.

Our third and final round of the Mitre 10 Mega Summer Race Series in April '22 saw the series bounce back from a slow start as we ran the meeting in conjunction with several National Championship classes, which included the mighty Supertrucks. Thankfully COVID restrictions ceased completely just days before this meeting so we were able to throw open the gates to the public, who welcomed the event with equally open arms. This meeting was the saving grace of the Summer Series and helped the overall Series return a record net result of just over \$30k. Once again thank you to Andrew Stewart from Stewarts Mitre 10 Mega for the ongoing sponsorship of our

Summer Race Series, your support of our club by the way of this sponsorship and the discounts that you give all of our MCC Members at Stewarts Mitre 10 Mega is truly appreciated.

April '22 also saw us hold the Summer Series Prizegiving at the Feilding Civic Centre. There was a great turnout for this event where we not only celebrated the winners and placegetters of the Summer Series, but we also honoured our magnificent volunteers. The highlight of the prizegiving for me was the hugely surprised and emotional look on the face of Rodney Penn as we read out his name as the Series Champion of Champions.

The 75th year anniversary festivities really kicked into high gear at the start of June '22 with the start of our club's flagship race series, the Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series, which the bulk of 75th anniversary festivities were being based around. Round one saw a record number of 117 entries that raced in the eight classes on the day, four of those classes attracted 20+ car fields, and a high number of new drivers made their racing debuts including several who had travelled up from the South Island. Clerk of the Course Malcom Glenn set the tone of the day where he delivered the drivers briefing dressed very formally in a very smart black dinner suit, white shirt, yellow bow tie and shiny black shoes, a sight that will not be forgotten quickly. To further mark the 75th year of the club, the introduction of special 75th round trophies were made, these being handed out to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd placegetters overall for each round of the four-round series.

The month of June '22 also marked an end of an era with the retirement and subsequent disbandment of the Taxi Cup Team... yes, the "Boys from the Bay" who enjoyed their racing like no other in the sports history, decided to hang up their shorts and jandals for a number of reasons. While the lads will be missed, they will never be forgotten, donating a magnificent solid timber bar leaner to the MCC along with some funds that they had "lying around" which are to be used to help keep our volunteers hydrated after our meetings. The MCC have also had a trophy made in their honour, the "Cabbies Trophy" will be given out at each Winter Series Prizegiving to the driver that has had the most unfortunately event during the series, or as Leo Van Berkel put it "the biggest biff".

June '22 also meant that the club would be turning 75 years young..., indeed it was with great luck that the 25th June 2022 (the day the club actually turned 75) was also a Saturday, so in planning this event, which started some 2 ½ years earlier, it was great that we could hold the anniversary dinner on this exact day. Nearly 150 people joined us at the Manawatu Golf Club that night to celebrate this milestone, there was no guest speaker, instead Russell Harris used a Q&A format involving twelve people who answered questions relating to the varied aspects of the club as they remembered them. One of the many highlights of the night was when I was able to propose a toast to the club's founders, the tribute taking place at 8pm which was the time that the meeting began at Fordy Farland's residence at 28 Manson Street in Terrace End some 75 years earlier. A very special thanks goes out to Jarod Carruthers, who freely gave his time to come and take a number of memorable pictures of the special night.

In looking back over the past 75 years of this great club there is one thing that is clear to see, the Manawatu Car Club has always punched above its weight. It has followed the visionary path established by its founders, the club has been a leader, an innovator, not an imitator. Its long list of achievements is proof of its success in all aspects of our sport, both on and off the track. The club's family has been strong for 75 years, the passion remains unwavering in the desire to continue to be the best.

July's round of the Winter Series was a round of mixed emotions... the excitement of over 130 entries, the most ever for a second round of a Winter Series, the glorious weather, which was more like a Spring Day than the middle of Winter, and the anticipation of a great days racing ahead, were all quickly turned on their ear by an event that will stay with us for many years to come. I remember standing at trackside of the pit garages watching the race, I remember commenting that something mechanical must have happened to Gerald's car exiting the hairpin on lap one, on lap two I remember hearing the sound of a car coming off of the track and I remember seeing the car hit hard into the tyre wall... I remember thinking that was a hard hit, I hope Gerald is ok...what happened next felt like it sucked the air out of the whole place. The concerned and anxious looks on everyone's faces told a story in itself... Out on the track at that moment that car hit the tyre barrier, something

truly awesome happened, that was that a group of volunteers put all of their years of hard training into action. Our FIV and rescue crews were at the scene in under a minute, not long after that they determined that something had happened that was not the result of the accident, rather the accident was the result of something else that had gone wrong. From that second on our volunteers, along with the help from Pro-Med, St Johns, and Dr Bruce Stewart, worked in unison to save the life of one of our own, and save it they did. Some days later, Gerald Watson summed up the whole event in one short sentence... "Motorsport saved my life". I always knew that we had the best volunteers in the country, I have seen firsthand the countless number of hours they put into training and preparing for each and every race event that we have, this event just proved to everyone else that they are the best. So, I urge each and every competitor to make sure that you give them all a big wave at the end of every race that you have, and to say thank you to them for the many hundreds of hours each and every one of them gives freely during the year, irrespective of the weather, so that we can go racing, for without them there would be no racing.

Following the events of Round 2, the decision to hold all entries over for Round 3 was made quite quickly as it was the right, and only, thing to do, the financial impact while considered, was never a deciding factor in this decision. August's Round 3 once again saw record entries and good weather, with the only glitch on the day being the one-hour interlude for the smoke alarm going off up in the Higgins suite which saw the arrival of the local fire brigade.

The fourth and final round of the Winter Series was a two-day carnival meeting. Over 150 entries for the weekend, a new record for a final round, and an overall record for any round of a Winter Series. The weekend's activities got underway on late Friday afternoon with a promotional display in Feilding's Manchester Square, the first time that the MCC has done this for many years. Teresa Browne had done an outstanding job putting it all together and the enthusiastic local people responded in very good numbers. The turn-out of competing vehicles was exceptional, arriving in convoy from the circuit via Manchester Street was an impressive sight for bystanders. Sheets of characterised series race cars stickers were handed out to the young fans and everyone was happy, it was the perfect start to the weekend... The socialising continued on Saturday night at the popular Drovers Bar in downtown Feilding. Around forty people attended at the conclusion of the day's racing to enjoy food, beverage and chatter in a most pleasant atmosphere. It was a mood that prevailed for the whole weekend which saw some great racing being had out on track, alongside some awesome demonstration laps by various invited car clubs, and from our MCC drift members.

We then capped the month of September off with Winter Series Prize Giving, where just under 100 people filled the Feilding Civic Centre for a truly amazing night, where we created some great memories, had a laugh or two, and got to celebrate alongside our award winners, it was another night to remember that is for sure. The trophies handed out on the night were one of a kind 75th Anniversary Year trophies, never to be won again, so the people that got one definitely received something special that is for sure. Only six of the 34 prize winners were unable to attend which was a tribute to how competitors viewed the awards night. There were many highlights on the night, however the top ones for me were when Gerald Watson received the Winter Series Spirit Award, and when the Chris Amon Champion-of-Champions Trophy was presented to young Formula First driver Toby McCormack, he was overwhelmed and it was a proud moment for his family who had driven down from Auckland on the day to be at the function.

So, the 2022 Winter Series was a huge success, it was fitting that we broke every record for the per round entries, the total number of entries (over 520 over the four rounds), the total number of different competitors who entered over those four rounds at 228, and the overall profitability from a Winter Series, in our 75th anniversary year. A huge thank you goes out to Huw and Kathy Allen from Feilding Auto Electrical for once again kindly sponsoring our flagship race series, it is an absolute pleasure to have you as our Series Naming Sponsor each and every year, I personally love the passion that you have for motorsport in general and for the endless support you have for our Club. To all of our Winter Series sponsors, thank you all for your ongoing generosity and for helping us to continue to make this the best club, and race series in the country.

Speaking of records, our MCC Membership hit an all-time high in the 2022 year, at 481 members it is 21 members ahead of the previous record, and is the sixth year in a row that we have been over 400 members. Our female membership base also climbed to record highs with over 80 female club members spread across all age groups, this is great to see as the female membership stats had declined in recent years.

Our Grassroots events which incorporated the Manfeild Open Days, a Bent Sprint and Back Track Autocrosses bounced back for the 2022 year, entries were up considerably over the previous years and so was profitability, to an all-time record, as we saw many newcomers to our sport. The ease with which these events are run and the fact that there are many seasoned competitors now willing to help mentor some of the younger generation coming through has had a lot to do with the success of these events. All of these events came under the terrific sponsorship banner of GT Oil and Transpec Services Ltd, who have proudly supported our entry level events for a number of years now. A huge thank you to Greg Browne and Warren Cleland for your ongoing support of our grassroots events.

Drifting fell back a bit in 2022, there are many reasons for this, none more so than the impact of COVID in the early months of the financial year, but as we progressed throughout the year the entries continued to grow and there was a feeling that drifting was finding its feet again. Troy Brown and his team are working hard to provide good quality events, incorporated into a busy nationwide drifting calendar, so I would like to think that drifting will be a big part of the club's continued success in 2023.

Overall, financially the clubs year was definitely a game of two halves, the first part of the year, as aforementioned, was difficult, but the second part of the year was a testament to the hard work and planning that was put in by so many, however I cannot help but wonder what the year might have been like if we had a full uninterrupted year... but as you will see in the upcoming financial report, it was not a bad year considering those interruptions and the fact that we invested in some much needed equipment for the club, and in the flag points on Manfeild: Circuit Chris Amon, we also subsidised and promoted the 75th Anniversary Dinner, all of which were good investments for the future of the club.

Regarding the future of the club, and in particular the MCC Clubrooms... I stated at the 2022 AGM that we were looking into the clubrooms and that an announcement would be made in the coming months. Since that date of the AGM a lot of things have happened (our 75th year events / celebrations planning for one). I for one stepped back a bit and did a full review of all of our assets and what we were likely to be needing in the years to come. I will say now that I would not be doing my job as President if I did not look at all of the options to do with the clubrooms, so this is what I set about doing. In looking into all of the options, other opportunities came to light, by way of my own thoughts and those of the MCC Committee, and it was voted unanimously by the committee to explore all of the options tabled. Part of the looking at all of the options was to talk with some key stakeholders, this being the Manfeild Park Trust and the Manawatu District Council, where we looked at some long-term planning that all organisations had in mind. Once these talks opened up, the future of the park took on a whole different light. I never focus on the right now, rather I look to see what is the best for the future of the club and for the many generations that will follow us, I certainly do not want future Presidents and Committees to be burdened with decisions made that are short-sighted in their approach, or are the easy option to be taken because it was just, well, easy to do. So, while on the face of it, it would seem that not a lot has been done, I can assure you that a lot, and more, has been done in the background, and while I cannot present some final options at this AGM, this item is one that I am looking to tick off of my list in the year to come. Please note that when we have all of the information gathered, nothing major will be done without full consultation with all of the members of the Manawatu Car Club.

In what was a special year several club members were outstanding performers on both the national and international stages.

Top of the list is Toyota Gazoo Racing star Brendon Hartley who won both the famous Le Mans 24 Hour race and FIA World Endurance Championship for the third time, a remarkable achievement at the highest level of sports car racing.

On the home front Chris Symon clinched back-to-back Hi-Q Components Formula First Championships contested over 19 races, his 18 podium finishes included 11 victories in what was a dominant season for the Newbury School Principal.

Justin Allen's fourth season in the highly competitive Toyota 86 Championship produced his best outcome when the Feilding driver finished fifth in the overall standings with two wins at Pukekohe highlighting his seven podiums in the 19-race series.

Also waving the Feilding and MCC flag was Kevin Ingram who has become the man-to-beat in the NZ F5000 Tasman Cup Revival Series, the former national hill-climb and Formula Ford champion won the final round of the 2021/22 Revival Series.

It was a difficult year for 36-year-old Chris Pither, a 136 race start veteran in the Australian Repco Supercar Championship. Driving the familiar # 22 Coca Cola ZB Commodore for new team owner PremiAir Racing didn't bring the results in what is one of the world's closest 'tin top' series where grids are decided by hundredths of a second. A best 9th placing in Race 32 at the Gold Coast 500 round wasn't enough to retain the drive in forthcoming 2023 season unfortunately.

All five drivers are great ambassadors for both the club and motorsport. Looking to the future, keep an eye on Blake Dowdall who comprehensively won the Formula Ford Cup in the Winter Series, the PNBHS student shows great promise and undoubtedly will be a front runner in the 2022/23 North Island Formula Ford Series competing against the country's top rising stars.

While I know the club is in a healthy position, I and the current MCC Committee are very aware that we can do better, so in the coming year we will be looking to further refine the systems and processes within the club. Indeed, at a recent committee meeting we as a group pointed out a few things that we felt we needed to be better at, so the incoming committee needs to concentrate on these areas to ensure we continue to give our volunteers, event competitors, and the general public, the best experience that we can possibly give them. We are also very mindful of the current financial landscape within New Zealand, and the pressure that this may put on people's discretionary spending, so will be keeping a close eye on this in the year to come.

I would like to give special thanks to our Club Secretary and Events Coordinator extraordinaire Jeff Braid, who by the way was also re-elected to the Race Advisory Commission of MSNZ this year, and who has just come out of the busiest year that the club has ever had, thank you for everything that you do for us Jeff, it is hugely appreciated by not only myself, but by everyone here and everyone that attends one of our events. Stephen McIvor recently commented on live TV that you were "Mr Manawatu Car Club himself..." and I think that sums it up quite nicely.

Also, a special thanks go to Kathy Gibson and her team at Manfeild, along with the Manfeild Park Trust Board, thank you for the continued support that you have given to the MCC over the past year, without your help we would have not been able to succeed in the ways that we have done, so it goes without saying that I do hope that we can continue to work closely together in the coming year.

And lastly but by no means least, thank you to our competitors, without you the 75th year of this club would not have been the year that it was...



Richie Arber
President
Manawatu Car Club Inc