

Manawatu Car Club Presidents Report – October 2023 – September 2024

The winds of change started to blow through in the 2024 financial year...

October 2023 was a great month for the Manawatu Car Club, arguably the best event the club has held, the celebration of 50 years of Manfeild, was held on Friday the 20th of October 2023, the date falling between the first clubman meeting run on the 13th of October 1973 when the Manfeild Autocourse was officially opened, and the first national meeting run the following month. More than 100 people attended the event, including several special and surprise guests from near and far, the first of whom was the original Stig, who was fittingly all dressed in his black race attire, and who typically refused to answer any questions before putting the microphone back on the stage table and walking out. I then left the room to see if I could find a guest who could actually speak and returned with Brendon and Sarah Hartley who were home between WEC commitments, the Monaco based couple were very warmly welcomed. The evening had many highlights, from the Zoom link with Graeme Lawrence, the handing out of the special made plaques (which uniquely featured a piece of the original track surface) to several key people/parties to acknowledge key roles in Manfeild's earliest days, the unveiling of the Porsche 919 Hybrid display car from the 2014 World Endurance Championship which was Brendon's first season with the famous German team, the onstage chat with Brendon, Sarah and Peter (PJ) Johnston, and the cutting of the cake by Sir Pat Higgins and James Amon. There were many people to thank for the evening, none more so than the Manfeild 50th Committee who did an outstanding putting together this great event in a very short timeframe.

October also saw the club hold the hugely popular OctoberFast Meeting. The event was oversubscribed with 12 race classes, and 200 entries, headlined by the ever-popular NZ Supertrucks which always help to bring in the crowds. Unfortunately, this year the gate sales were down on the previous year, but we must remember we had the fifty years of Mack Trucks celebration the year before, so to come away with revenue that was up on the previous year was a great effort by the event management team. The only thing missing from the meeting was the voice of Manfeild, Russell Harris, who was sidelined with ill health following the Manfeild 50th Celebration, it was the first time in 48 years that Rusty had missed a commentary commitment.

November meant our flagship drift event ShowVember was back, this year with a slightly different format to previous years where we utilised the whole front and back tracks with drift battles and drift practice taking place on the main track, and drift tutoring taking place on the back track. The new format worked well with 50 entries in total, as did the Charity Circuit Cruise which raised \$1,250.00 for the "I Am Hope" charity.

November also saw us hold a "President's Day" on the back track, the day was for our many wonderful volunteers, we had a number of drift and race cars take them for many rides around the back track and we put on a lunchtime BBQ that kept everyone's tummies full. Thanks to all of those people that gave their time and their vehicles freely to put smiles on the faces of the people that look after us when we go racing.

December '23 saw the first of the three round Stewarts Mitre 10 Mega Summer Race Series. Thanks to the demise of the Pukekohe Raceway there was a new look to the series with the regular RS, SF, IB and GT Cup classes supplemented by rounds of the National Formula First Championship, Giltrap Group North Island Formula Ford, Mini Super challenge/Pre 65 and NAPA Central Muscle Car Series. The expanded programme meant the meeting was run over two days. A good number of entries were seen for this event given the extra classes, however due to having championship classes at the event it also meant the cost to run the event was quite a bit higher.

The two latter rounds of the Summer Series in February & April '24 again saw them combined with other classes from around the country such as the Superkarts, OK Cup, Production Race Series, Touring Car Masters, Historic Sports Sedans, Formula Open, Pirelli Porsche Championship, Mazda Racing Series, as well as the aforementioned classes from the December round coming back for more, and the Supertrucks came back for a second round at Manfeild in April after headlining the OctoberFast meeting. Prizegiving for the Summer Series and the club's

Volunteer Awards Dinner was held mid-April '24 at the world class Coach House Museum in Feilding, 65 people attended the evening. Colin Hamilton, Felesha Peters, Mitchell Miller, Thomas Bingley, Hokimoana Tawa, Manu Jensen, and Noel Beale, deservedly took home the Volunteer silverware. Prior to the event starting a very significant gift was presented to the club by our photographer Jarod Carruthers. It was a crash helmet signed by many of the top drivers who raced in the Nissan-Mobil 500's on the Wellington waterfront circuit in the 1980's and 1990's. The Manawatu Car Club was heavily involved in those events, officials, volunteers, and drivers, also many of the names competed at Manfeild during their careers, the gift was graciously accepted and is now included in the club's archives.

January 2024 meant the Super Sprint series was in town, unfortunately there were only four classes - CTFROC, Toyota 86, NZ GT, and Super V8 which included the TA2 cars and V8 Utes. The highlight of the whole weekend for me was to be a part of the team that put together two great (life) members of the club, Russell Harris and Brian Green, where Brian took Russell for a ride in his GT4-spec McLaren. In Russell's own words... "What happened next was so humbling and unexpected, slowly driving down pit lane between two lines of clapping Manawatu Car Club officials and Manfeild V-Force volunteers, my people. It was a moment neither Brian nor I had previously experienced with emotional tears forming. With the combination of a damp track and slick tyres the ride itself will always be remembered, a story in itself. Back into pit lane, a reaction interview with Emma Gilmore, into the 'garage', unstrapped, helmet and HANS removed, exiting was much easier than entering, and a surprise greeting from Murph, Greg and I go back to 1990 when he won the inaugural Shell Formula Ford Scholarship as an 18-year-old." It was an emotional experience, and one that will be remembered forever by all involved.

February meant Fugu February Drift Practice, again another great drift event which was sold out within a couple of days of being advertised, so entry numbers were expanded to 46 from the normal 40 to accommodate those extra six entrants that so badly wanted to be there, over 90 passengers signed the indemnity forms, so it was an action packed day with lots of fun and smiling faces for all involved.

May 2024 saw the club undertake a truly remarkable initiative, the Manchester House Food Drive which was organised by club members Jaron and Kester Olivecrona. The event started in the Manchester Square in Feilding where drift, race, and rally cars parked up so the public could come and have a look and more importantly drop off non-perishable food. The convoy of cars then toured around Feilding stopping at various locations along the way collecting more non-perishable food. The result, many thousands of dollars' worth of food donated to Manchester House along with a cheque for \$3,000.00 from the MCC from donations received from charity cruises held at various MCC events. A huge thanks goes to Jaron, Kester, and everyone who gave their time freely to participate in this tremendous event.

May also saw the return of the Pararorangi Road Gravel Sprint. 34 people participated in the event where there was a planned practice run and three timed runs. We had to stop the event after two timed runs due to the deteriorating surface in a couple of turns, to continue on would not have been fair on the local residents. Unfortunately, the road was graded 3 weeks before the event despite assurances it would be done after the event. MDC said they will sort this with the grading contractors for future events. Prize giving in the Cheltenham Hotel was well attended. A big thanks to Greg Browne for getting this event back on the calendar.

May meant that it was Motorsport NZ AGM & Conference time which Jeff Braid, and I attended on behalf of the Manawatu Car Club. The AGM saw a changing of the guard as Deborah Day officially became the first woman President of Motorsport New Zealand. On the Saturday night the MSNZ Awards Dinner were held at the stunning Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, and what a great night it was for the Manawatu Car Club... Life Member and Club Patron, Russell Harris was awarded an "Historic Heritage Award" for his services to motorsport in New Zealand. Russell was taken down to Christchurch on false pretences as I had said to him that my plus one, my wife Lydia, could not make it down, so rather than the plane / dinner ticket go to waste I wanted Russell to come and be my plus one. The look on Russell's face as his bio was read out before his name was announced was priceless, and I will be so ever grateful that I was there to be able to share in that moment

and stand alongside of him on the stage that night. And if that wasn't enough, the icing on the cake was that our favourite son Brendon Hartley was once again awarded the Jim Clark Trophy, the fifth time he has been awarded this honour. Brendon is the club's third winner of the coveted trophy; it was awarded to Rob Lester in 1979 and Kevin Ingram in 1983.

Another great event held in May was the Winter Series Information Night. Around 35 people joined us in person, while another 40 joined us via a live feed that we had set up, to hear about the upcoming Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series... it was a very informative evening with Clerk of the Course Malcom Glen, Scrutineer's Rod McCardle & Greg Browne, Rescue Marshall Donna Whale, and Event Organisers Jeff Braid & Jodie Bell, all speaking on the night. The feedback for this event was again nothing but positive, so we will be looking to do it again before the next winter series. A big thank you to Rod McCardle for letting us have the use of his workshop for the event.

June arrived and with it the start of our club's flagship race series, the Feilding Auto Electrical Winter Race Series. The series format stayed the same, 8 classes, qualifying and three 6-lap races for each round of a four round series held over the first weekend of the months of June, July, August, and September. Since they were such a hit the previous two years, the round trophies returned in 2024 for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd placegetters overall for each class for each round of the four-round series. Overall, the series attracted some 384 entries in total, so while this figure was down on the previous two years, it remains the largest multi round club series in NZ by far. Some 96 people attended another great Winter Series Prizegiving event which was once again held at the Feilding Civic Centre mid-September. It was a relaxed night full of fun and laughter, the highlight of the night for me was being able to present the Winter Series Spirit Award to Russell Harris for reasons explained on the night.

Our Grassroots and Clubsport events which incorporates the GT Oil and Transpec Services Ltd Manfeild Open Days, Multi Event Weekend, Bent Sprint, Gravel Sprint, Back Track & Grass Autocrosses, and the 24 Minutes of Le Manfeild dropped back overall from the previous year's resurgence, and while the year started off well, entries started to drop away as the year went on as peoples financial situations tightened, so overall entries and revenue were down on previous years.

After Drifting had a stellar year in 2023, it too followed suit with the Grassroots and Clubsport events, drifting back with regards to the number of entries per event as the year went on, hence revenue was slightly down on the previous year but it was still more than double that of the 2022 financial year, so this should not be viewed as a bad thing in my eyes. The aforementioned ShowVember, Fugu February, our front and back track drift tutoring and practice days are all part of the package that we offer our drifting community. Drifting is a big part of this club, and rightly so, the passion that the guys and girls show for their sport is second to none. I would like to thank Troy Brown and Jodie Bell and the rest of the Drift Team for their continued support of their sport and for organising and running some truly great events over the year.

After hitting an all-time high in 2023 year with 486 members, our MCC Membership declined just a little bit in the 2024 year, at 482 members this is still our second-best membership result. It is the eighth year in a row that we have been over 400 members. Sadly, our female membership declined, down from 82 to 65 members in 2024. Overall, the strongest age group remains the 36-60 age bracket.

Our Facebook page continues to go from strength to strength where we now have some 9,400 followers from around the world, up 1,100 followers on the same time last year. During our busier motorsport months, we have had as many as 198,000 page views per month. It shows that the content on our page is the right stuff that people want to see and more importantly read. 76% of our audience is male, with the balance of 24% being women, the largest age group for both is in the 25-34 age bracket, followed by the 35-44 age bracket.

One of the absolute pleasures of being the president of this club is working with our family of sponsors, many of whom have been with us for well over a decade now. The generosity these sponsors give to our club is well and truly above and beyond the call of duty as the actual sponsorship is only a small part of what they do. Many also support the club in other ways, whether it be the supply of goods/labour at very good rates, and/or experienced

advice and help, they are always there when we need them, and many of them race with us on a regular basis as well, and for this I would like to thank each and every one of them for what they do for this club. Our current family of sponsors are, Huw & Kathy Allen from Feilding Auto Electrical (our naming sponsor for our Winter Race Series), Andrew Stewart from Stewarts Mitre 10 Mega (our naming sponsor for our Summer Race Series), Greg Browne from GT Oil and Warren Cleland from Transpec Services Ltd (our naming sponsors for our Grassroots and Clubsport events), Matt Tasker from Danny's Autos, Anton Cheetham from Geartech Automotive, Geoff Spencer from Coresteel Buildings Manawatu, Ernie Stevens from Ernie's Engineering, Ben & Tammie Boyden from BT Advisory, Johnathan & Jill Hogg from Max Tarr Electrical Ltd, Jeremy Hoskins from Tremaine Energy Centre, Nick Stewart from SAFEngineering, Shane Hayter from H.E.L Performance, and Kerry Halligan from Tracgrip Hydraulics & Equipment Ltd. Thank you all for your ongoing generosity and support and for helping us to continue to make this the best car club in the country.

Financially the club continues to be in a very strong position, and although down on the previous year, this year has still been a positive year which should not be forgotten. Has it been a tough year, I expect everyone on the MCC Committee that is here tonight would be answering yes to that question right now in their heads, but given that the committee is now very experienced with most having sat on the committee for more than a decade, we were certainly not blindsided with what transpired throughout the year, far from it, we could see what was about to happen well before it did and conversations about how we were going to mitigate the risks involved happened well before the events unfolded. Is the year ahead going to be hard, definitely, 2025 will see many changes within Motorsport in NZ, some I feel will not help the grassroots of our sport and that area is the area where we need to remain strong in and support those classes and those competitors all the while trying to keep the cost to go racing down as much as we can. The pressures to do that, keep the cost down, are mounting up every day, the rise in the cost of living has had a huge impact and has meant that the club pays more for everything that it needs to run an event, from fuel to food, to the cost of the track hire which has gone up 40% in the last year, add to this the regulatory pressures on clubs and circuits from a very risk averse governing body, as well as continued pressures from local governing bodies especially around noise, in the end this all puts pressure on the cost to go racing, so the MCC Committee is looking at every option right at the moment.

So with all of that said, I cannot thank the current committee enough for the awesome work that they have put in once again over the past year, thank you all for your continued passion for this great club, the willingness to explore all options, and to think outside of the square. Every one of the committee members have contributed this year, you have all stepped up to the plate when it was needed the most and our members are lucky to have you on the committee.

A huge thank you also to Jeff Braid and Jodie Bell. As reported last year, Jodie came back on board to sit alongside Jeff and learn everything from him with regards to running race meetings and with the administration of the club, while it continues to be a work in progress it has been worth its weight in gold for a number of reasons, none more so than to have back up when and if required, and to lessen the ever increasing load on what was one person up until the start of 2024. With the ever-evolving changes that are happening in motorsport right now, there is no better time than now to have Jodie and Jeff working alongside one another.

The biggest thanks of all unashamedly must go to our wonderful V-Force. Our volunteers are the lifeblood of our sport, without each and every one of them we do not go racing, it is as simple as that! It has been so pleasing for me to see a number of new faces who have joined our V-Force team over the past year. We have looked at how we can improve things for our volunteers, from better equipment to the food catered at our events, I hope that the changes that have been made help to make our volunteers jobs that much easier and nicer. A massive thank you from me and from everyone that races with us, for the time that you, our V-Force, give up freely to us so that we can go racing, but most of all thank you for keeping us safe. Your dedication to, and support of our club, is truly awe-inspiring, we cannot thank you enough for what you do for us.

I said last year that if I was re-elected, I had several points to focus on over the coming year. One of those points was the changes to the Incorporated Societies Act that officially came into force on the 5th of October 2023 and what those changes meant for our club's constitution. It has been quite a big effort to get to where we are

tonight where we can present the new constitution and discuss those changes with an eye to ratifying it at this AGM. If we can't do that tonight, for whatever reason, then we will have to go to a Special General Meeting in the months ahead. I want to say a huge thank you to our Vice President Tim Wilde for his help in getting the new constitution to the point that it is at tonight.

One of my other focus points was succession planning. As aforementioned we have Jodie sitting alongside Jeff, we also have set up a youth committee consisting of four club members handpicked by the MCC Committee. Those four members, Sean Browne, Tessa Field, Bryce Hogg, and Joshua Thiele, were invited to attend a recent committee meeting where they got to see the workings of the committee and gain more of an insight into the club. They are all passionate about the club and motorsport and they already have some good ideas about the future of the club.

We are also looking at making everything easier, right from the way people join the club, to everything that happens on a race day for not only the competitors but for all of the volunteers, so we are looking at building a Manawatu Car Club App in 2025 that will help from both an admin and competitor / volunteer point of view. To help this we are also looking to completely revamp the current website to a more user-friendly format.

And lastly but by no means least, I mentioned at the last AGM that we were working with some key stakeholders such as the Manfeild Park Trust and the Manawatu District Council to look at what the future of the Manfeild Park may look like. Over the past year there have been some good robust discussions around this, opportunities continue to present themselves as we progress, albeit slowly, so now is the time to take the next step and put some of those discussions into action, so I will be pushing for this to happen.

The 2023/24 period was another big year for New Zealand drivers at local, national and international level with Manawatu Car Club members continuing to feature strongly.

Brendon Hartley continued to enjoy the highest profile as the defending champion in the 2024 FIA World Endurance Championship with Toyota Gazoo Racing co-drivers Sébastien Buemi and Ryo Hiramatsu. Following many years of one-make domination (Audi, Peugeot, Porsche, Toyota) the Hypercar category involved nine manufacturers with three sharing the spoils of victory - Porsche, Toyota and Ferrari, the latter winning the flagship Le Mans 24 Hour for the second successive year. Ferrari and Porsche won at COTA and Fuji which meant the 8 Hours of Bahrain would be the title decider in the most competitive season in WEC history. Like the previous year the Bahrain race fell outside the club's financial year period and like the previous year Brendon, Sébastien and Ryo were the winners. With the 2-hour longer race carrying additional points the victory meant Toyota won the Manufacturer's Championship for the sixth successive year, two points ahead of Porsche. In the Driver's Championship the Hartley/Buemi/Hiramatsu trio were 5th on the points table, two places behind their #7 teammates.

Rianna O'Meara-Hunt enjoyed another season on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, highlighted by racing on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Road Course for the first time. Rianna again shared the 'Heart of Racing' Aston Martin Vantage with her American co-driver Hannah Grisham, ending their campaign with back-to-back wins in the Pirelli GT4 American AM Series and kissing the famous bricks that mark the start/finish line. Back in England she was selected for the Aston Martin Racing Elite Driver Academy and shared a drive in the GT Cup Championship with Scotland's Jodie Sloss.

Kaleb Ngatoa enjoyed a busy year's racing at home and abroad with meetings in Japan and Australia on his busy schedule. A highlight was Round 3 of the 2024 SuperSprint NZ Championship series at Hampton Downs where Kaleb became the first local driver to win a CTFROC race, finishing 0.389 seconds ahead of the Polish star and champion elect Roman Belinski after 35 laps of wheel-to-wheel racing. Appropriately, he was presented with the Dorothy Smith Memorial Trophy by Kenny Smith. Two weeks later at Highlands Park he went from hero to zero, suffering a broken hand after clipping the barrier during the qualifying session. Missing the final three races, the loss of points dropped Kaleb from P3 to P6 in the series standings.

New Zealand's 'domestic' calendar had a number of important milestones during the period.

Of historical significance, Round 3 of the Super Sprint MotorSport New Zealand Championship at Manfeild Circuit Chris Amon saw the running of the 300th TRS/CTFROC race. Nineteen years earlier Brendon Hartley won the first TRS race at the inaugural Series meeting at Timaru.

2024 marked the twenty-first season of the SAS Autoparts MSC Formula 5000 NZ Tasman Cup Revival series where multiple champion Kevin Ingram continues to be a front runner. The Feilding driver had mixed results with four podium finishes and a win in the three New Zealand rounds, unlike previous years the series was run as separate events with no overall winner.

The season marked fifty years of the New Zealand Formula First Championship; it also saw the name of Chris Symon engraved for the fourth successive time to emulate his father Ross' achievement in the 1980's.

The ultra-competitive Toyota 86 Championship saw the emergence of Jackson Rooney as a serious front-runner. The kart champion was named a finalist of the Tony Quinn Foundation Award and won the Hampton Downs New Zealand Racing Academy Toyota 86 Shoot-Out to claim a \$37,500 cash prize for the 2024 season. In what was a remarkable 'rookie' year, 20-year-old Rooney started in 18 races, scored 8 podium results with 5 wins that included the 'triple' at Hampton Downs, Tom Bewley won the title with Rooney 4th in the final standings, just one place ahead of class veteran and club mate Justin Allen. For Rooney it was an unmatched period in his racing career as the 'prize' included a full test session at Queensland Raceway driving the Red Bull Ampol Gen3 Camaro.

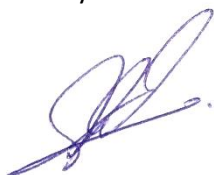
In the open-wheel categories the Dennis Martin influence continues to develop future stars through the Sabre MotorSport Scholarship with several standouts emerging during the season. At just 12 years of age Jackson Culver, from the small settlement of Loburn in North Canterbury, became the country's youngest MSNZ licenced competitor and the youngest driver to win a national championship race.

Formula Ford remains a highly competitive category as the new generation of young drivers move up from Formula First. In the Giltrap Group North Island Championship Blake Dowdall was again a front runner but had to settle for third place in the overall standings after being runner-up the previous year.

The highlight of the year for me was seeing Sean Browne win the NZ Six North Island Championship, most of the time against much adversity, when others may have given up, Sean believed in himself and got the job done, winning the title at his home track was just the icing on the cake.

I would now like to say a special thanks to a few other people. The Manfeild Park Trust team, along with Board Chairman Hamish Waugh and the rest of the Manfeild Park Trust Board, MDC Mayor Helen Worboys, MDC Chief Executive and MCC Member Shayne Harris, thank you all for the continued support that you have given to the MCC over the past year, without your help and your sharing in the vision that the MCC has, we would have not been able to succeed in the ways that we have done again this year, so it goes without saying that I look forward to what we can achieve together in the coming years.

And lastly but by no means least, thank you to all of the people that shared our events with us, without you the 77th year of this club would not have been the year that it was...



Richie Arber
President
Manawatu Car Club Inc