

GEORGE [JOE] LAWTON

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George Lawton, or Joe as we called him, was involved with the Northland Car Club from the start. Firstly with a light blue Zephyr Mk1 convertible which he hillclimbed with some success.

Joe was a stocky good-natured chap of around 17-18 years old, son of George Lawton of Lawton Construction. He next bought an Austin Healey 100-6 and competed with this in hillclimbs and circuit races whenever possible. His best mates were Mike Clark [who finished up with his own car yard in Khyber Pass, Auckland and went on to become a Manager of Coutts Mercedes and Independent Prestige in Auckland] and Buster Hill [who at one time was Manager of Jerry Clayton BMW Auckland].

Mike and I served our apprenticeships together at Weston Motors in Whangarei and I did hear stories of their exploits when going racing with Joe. One time trying out a new set of Michelin X tyres on the Healey they had a high speed 360 spin by the Kamo Spa without hitting anything and later with the bob-tailed Cooper they used to put it on the back of Lawton Constructions International 2 ton ute and sitting 3 across the seat used to change drivers at 60/70 mph.

Joe bought the Cooper Climax sports car off Bruce McLaren which Bruce held the Puhipuhi record in 49.8secs and I know that Joe was determined to beat this time. I have a strong memory of being crowd marshall at the hairpin and seeing Joe fly around the corner going off into the blackberries on the outside, getting back on the road and howling on up to the finish. My memory also says that Joe did set a new record at Puhipuhi but regrettably this is not in my lists of results.

I used to take Westons Motors tow truck to events and at Waipu Gorge sprint one day had to pull the Cooper back up a bank where it had flipped over the side. I remember seeing the grass stains on Joe's shoulders and back and thinking how lucky he was to be uninjured.

Dick Penney Westons Motors chief panelbeater rebuilt the alloy body and did an amazing job. Then for the 1959 season Joe bought the ex McLaren single seater Cooper and set out to prove he was NZ's top resident driver. The aim was to win the coveted "Driver to Europe" award won the previous year by Bruce McLaren. As Secretary I wrote letters to the N.Z.I.G.P putting forward his name but it seems we had stiff competition from a virtual unknown named Denis Hulme. After a hard fought season they both were chosen and set off in 1960 for a season in Europe. The season was a hard grind for both drivers but towards the end, team managers were taking note of Joe because he was a hard trier. He was signed up by a F1 team [I think Yeoman Credit] for the following season when in an end of season meeting at Roskildering, Sweden Joe was thrown from his cart-wheeling car and died from his injuries. He had spun out at the same spot in practice the day before but typically still gave the corner everything he'd got.

A quiet good-natured guy and a true Northland sportsman.



Picture from the Net of a Cooper Climax Bobtail sports.

On the back of this photo I wrote ." The day Joe broke the record with a time of 49.6 secs.



At Puhipuhi hairpin at an earlier event. The car is a different colour.



The Austin Healey 100-6 at Waipu Gorge
Sorry about my amateur photography with a Kodak Box Brownie camera!

