

NOTABLE NORTHLAND CAR CLUB COMPETITORS

Roy Billington, Vic Simpkin, John Windelburn and Neil Johns

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Roy Billington worked for the Whangarei Engineering Company in the Engine Reconditioning division as a crankshaft grinder.

A quiet diligent worker who was a perfectionist at everything he did. As a competition driver though he was very determined and forceful. He started competing in a 100E Prefect but then built Whangarei's first Buckler sports. These were a beautifully shaped fiberglass bodied sports car on a tubular chassis with usually Ford 10 mechanicals. Roy's was immaculately constructed with an Elva overhead inlet valve conversion to the Ford 10 side valve motor, a 4 speed Austin A35 gearbox and was a very competitive unit. I have photos of Roy spinning off at Ardmore and very sideways at Puhipuhi which demonstrate his determination.

He left NZ in the early 60's and joined Jack Brabham finishing up his No 1 mechanic. This was no surprise to us because Roy would work all night to ensure perfection.

He retired to Australia keeping in contact with Brabham.

Vic Simpkin The late Vic Simpkin was an inaugural member of our club. The most easy going, pleasant, likable chap you could ever hope to meet. Vic always had time to welcome you and try and help if you were in trouble. He was Whangarei Branch Manager for Firestone tyres and started competing in a Vauxhall Velox. Vic built up a Buckler sports based on Ford 10 parts and fitted an overhead inlet valve conversion made in Christchurch. I helped Vic build this car and we also fitted an A35 gearbox. However we had continual overheating problems which eventually were diagnosed as a porous aluminium head casting. He then had Lionel Bulcraig fit a Humber 90 engine and Rapier gearbox and the car became quick and reliable. Vic's driving was always smooth and stylish but also very competitive.

He left Firestone to buy the Dargaville Service Station and he was building up a very prosperous business when he suffered a heart seizure due to a blood clot which resulted in his untimely death. He is sorely missed by all who knew him.

John Windelbur, a Maungaturoto garage proprietor was an enormous natural talent as a driver.

First in a Singer Sports, then in NZ's quickest A35 with which he very nearly won NZ saloon car championship honours. Johnny then bought a Lotus Eleven sports which was a bit temperamental but had some good results at Wigram and Levin. I joined Johnny as a mechanic around 1961/2 and came to appreciate his mechanical ability as well as his driving skill. By now he was competing in a Mk7 Jaguar and quite often would turn up at hillclimbs in any old Ford V8 he could put his hands on.

Selling the Maungaturoto garage John shifted to Auckland and formed an automatic Transmission repair company [North Shore Automatics] and still turned up at Pukekohe occasionally with V8 muscle cars and ex-Australian touring car Nissans.

His son Shaun races a Lola F5000 car and I frequently see John at Hampton Downs wielding spanners on Shauns car.

It is a great pity that when John was on the road to the top, the right car and the right backing were not available because he could have gone all the way to the top.

Neil Johns. My first recollection of Johnsey involved in Car Club events was seeing him driving his Fathers Austin Westminster in a Car Trial down Auckland way and then competing in his Mothers Mini at Austins Road.

However Neil was serious about his motor racing and moved on to Mini Coopers with which he was always very smooth and fast holding to this day the hill record at Griffens Road Maungaturoto and entertaining the crowd with his Mini-spin starts at Puhipuhi. Neil also was invited to entertain the crowds at Pukekohe one year doing Mini-spins down the start finish straight during lunchbreak.

Then Johnsey became a Triumph 2000 devotee and came back from England with a Triumph TR5 fuel injected motor which Johnny Windelburn installed in his Mk1 Triumph 2000. With this car he hillclimbed whenever he could but jumped at the chance of competing in Rallies when they started in New Zealand. He competed in the first Silver Fern Rally with Glen McLean as co- driver and this really planted the bug.

I became responsible for his cars preparation and in the next Silver Fern rally Neil was leading towards the finish when he became affected by fumes from a leaking fuel pressure gauge and got passed by Paul Adams in a BMW.

This resulted in an invitation to compete in the Australian Southern Cross rally and he took me along as co-driver. We got off course a couple of times and finished 4th in class.

Next Neil bought a M2 Triumph Pi and hillclimbed and rallied this car with much success. Always pushing it hard but never damaging it

In later years I have read about him in rallies in a Honda and seen him at Pukekohe racing a BMW. His career must be nearly as long as Kenny Smiths but the last time I was talking to him he said he'd caught the fishing bug!

Brian Skudder

Johnny Windelburn standing by his son's Lola at Pukekohe. Ready with the spanners as usual.



Johnny Austin A35 exiting Puhipuhi hairpin



Two shots of Johnsey in the Mk1 Triumph at Mcleans road.

Roy Billington Buckler just after the first I/hander at Puhipuhi



Jack Brabham & team at the end of the 1966 World Championship season which Jack won. Roy squatting by the rear wheel.

Vic Simpkin Buckler with Humber 90 engine after the first I/hander at Puhipuhi



Vic in his Vauxhall Velox entering the hairpin at Puhipuhi.