



Ben Manning *left*: Introduces Well Known International Driver Olivier Gendebien to the new Westwood Racing Circuit, 1960 (SCCBC)

BEN MANNING

Pioneer - Sports Car and Road Racing

By Ben Manning Jr. Edited by Tom Johnston

Ben Manning came to Vancouver via Newfoundland in February of 1950, from London England. He, his wife Pim and small son had come to start a new life after the war. Ben had a background in radio-telephones and electronics which found him work with Spilsbury & Tindal, a well known Vancouver firm that supplied radios to logging camps, tugs and the Black Ball ferry system.

Being from the old country, Ben had a desire for some of the more innovative automobiles of the day and chose to purchase a Jowett Javelin, sold exclusively by Leverington Motors.

Mike Balfe was an employee of Leverington's that Ben got to know well, and it was he that suggested Ben join this new sports car club that had members all over the province where he was going to drive this Jowett Javelin. Ben became a member of the Sports Car Club of British Columbia (SCCBC) soon after its formation year.

It was this early association between Mike and Ben and another five or so visionaries in the SCCBC, that the idea of building their own racing circuit was formed. The Abbotsford Airport romance was coming to an end and they needed a place to race. So Dr Claire Wilson, Jim Lee, Ken McLean, Mike Balfe and Ben Manning got the idea up and running. There were many war room sessions at Doc Wilson's and the Manning's planning final layouts, finding ways to acquire land and finally through the assistance of one of two club members with close ties to the provincial government, a cozy spot on Blue Mountain, far from the city crowds was found and leased to become the legendary Westwood.

Jim Lee and Mike Balfe are credited with the idea of debentures to create the \$50,000 needed and Ben and Doc Wilson were at the helm. Then an unfortunate event happened, one night on Burnett, almost below Dr Wilson's home, he and a fellow member, Spud Brown were out in Spud's brand new Porsche 356 Carrera. There was a terrible crash at the rail tracks at Braid St. and Burnett Ave. and Brown was killed and Dr Wilson was severely



Manning left: Speaking at the Westwood 50th Anniversary Event, 2009 (Frechette photo)

injured. As they say, the show must go on. Ben took up the reins and led the team and SCCBC to complete the Westwood Racing Circuit.

Ben created plans to market the circuit, it was quickly becoming the talk of the West Coast, held the first endurance race in Canada, and got the acknowledged as one of the top in the world by well known Belgian Grand Prix driver Olivier Gendebien.

Ben was a fixture in the creation and administration of the track for

nearly ten years. He raised funds to build the first timing tower, got Imperial Tobacco to fund the first track crossing bridge. He helped the Westwood Karting club to become an entity and have a state of art track on the Westwood property.

Manning was one of the charter Presidents of the International Conference of Sports Car Clubs (ICSCC) and when he relocated to Victoria, took the reins of the Victoria Motor Sports Club, where he helped Western Speedway owner Andy Cottyn to design and construct a road circuit.

And while doing all this, he still found time to organize and compete in the two most enjoyed rallies of the day, the Van Man Van and the Caribou, both full weekend events.

Ben Manning lives on Pender Island today and spoke very eloquently at the 2009 Westwood50 gala that celebrated the 50th birthday of Westwood's opening day.



Ben Manning, 1960 (SCCBC archives)