

By Grant Granger

What began as a dare amongst gearheads in a repair shop quickly transformed into a lifetime passion for auto racing and, eventually induction into two halls of fame.



Al Ores was born in Slovenia in 1933 to German parents who ended up in Austria when the war was over. Despite having a couple of fingers blown off by a hand grenade, Ores went to work in the Puch Motorcycle factory in Austria before immigrating to Canada in 1953 settling in Burnaby where he still lives.

He went to work at Bert's Automotive in Vancouver and in 1968, on a bet with two of his workmates, took racing lessons at Westwood Race Track in Coquitlam.

"We wanted to see who would chicken out first and nobody did," recalls Ores.

Ores raced around the track in a 1965 Mustang and he was hooked. He won his first race in a heavy rainfall in Seattle on his 36th birthday and he's been

buying, building and racing cars, and mentoring many a mechanic and racer at tracks from Portland to Edmonton ever since.

"When it gets you, it gets you like a bug like gambling or drinking," the 85-year-old admits, "You like racing so much you race every race that was there. Then I got initiated to the race drivers committee to make the rules and make sure everything was according to rules, so we spent oodles of time out there on the track."

Ores notes he'd be out there almost every Tuesday and Thursday night manning the corners.

"It's a camaraderie and you help, and then the next race they go out and beat the hell out of you, but then you work with them," says Ores. "That was our home, my whole family, we grew up there."

Along the way, Ores got to rub shoulders with Canadian racing legend Gilles Villeneuve, and Finnish flash Keke Rosberg, and actors with a hankering for fast

cars like Paul Newman and Richard Dean Anderson (aka MacGyver). Ores was inducted into the B.C. Motorsports Hall of Fame as a pioneer in 2002 and will go into the Burnaby Sport Hall of Fame as a builder on Feb. 28. He still goes out to race tracks to help out, to dish out advice and to occasionally go out for a lap or two, sometimes even racing around the track with the likes of his grandson.

“For half an hour I’m in no pain whatsoever and then I come into the pits and I’m yelling ‘oh my god, oh my god!’ My wife says, ‘well next time put a helmet on and go to bed with it on,’ ” Ores says with a laugh.

Although he’s an octogenarian Ores still has his driver’s licence thanks to his doctor since he’s required to get medical approval to keep driving.

“They don’t want to commit themselves, if there was really something wrong with me they wouldn’t let me go. They close an eye and let me go,” chuckles Ores. (Grant Granger is chair of the Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame)

• The 18th annual Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame banquet will be held at the Metrotown Firefighters club banquet hall, 6515 Bonsor Ave., Burnaby, on Thursday, Feb 28 (reception 6 p.m., dinner 7 p.m.) Tickets are available at tickets09@shaw.ca or by phoning Rosemary at 604-436-1672.