

CHAPTER 8

Final Tributes

"... and We Thought it Could Never End"

*A Tribute to G. B. and Lydia Sterne,
The Morgans, The Track, The Life*

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"... and we thought it could never end."

This was the only kind of comment fellow Morganeer Larry Emrik and I could come up with, Monday evening, October 15th, 1990, when I got the call that George Beatty Sterne had died suddenly that afternoon, at home in Deep Bay, Vancouver Island.

Many of us never thought that those irksome little British sports cars mysteriously brought to life most of the time by the gods of Lucas would ever stop being produced, or that Westwood track would not always be there to test such cars prowess at dicing around a great track. Well, the start of the 1990s brought the last ever Historic Westwood Races as the track was scheduled to go to subdivision, and now in October a person symbolizing many of the great names in British Columbia motorsport had just passed away.

In the Beginning

What of before all this? After service in the Second World War, GB owned and operated a recycled Standard Chevron Station in Sidney on Vancouver Island as a service garage. Eventually this became the first home for the fledgling Morgan dealership that George had to work so hard to get. In convincing Peter Morgan that it would be viable, it came down to an appeal to Peter's loyalty to serving the outposts of the British Empire with Mogs that finally closed the deal!

Life before Morgans included early eventing with a black MG TD in 1954 that GB and his wonderful wife and partner at the track Lydia would drive over to the Abbotsford track. Later this was replaced with their first Morgan, a 1957 Plus 4 4-Seater, and at age 45 George's driving career began in earnest.

From the Late `50s to the Early `70s

These were the great years of GB, Morgan and Westwood events. GB was the man and the myth in the `60s at Westwood. The fans in the pits all knew of this guy who drove the funny Mog over from Vancouver Island.

Son Bob Sterne considers one of his most precious memories of his dad was when they raced together in 1972, with George in his Plus 8. The Canadian Championships were held at Mosport, and they both DROVE the Mogs to the Ontario races and home again.

G.B. expressed his philosophy many times and in 1974 he told Sun columnist Alan Daniels, "Every other driver put their car on a trailer to get to Mosport (Ontario). I hitched a trailer full of spare parts to my car and I drove it there. When we got to Mosport, we unhooked the trailer, drove the race, hooked the trailer back up again and drove home via California!"

Bob Sterne, also an outstanding driver in his own racing career with ICSCC championships to his credit, has his favourite "cagy-wily" story, too. "The cutest story about dad was during a race he had with Dave Collis,

Mog driver and mechanic at the Burnaby shop, in 1973. They had a race-long dice, and on the last lap Dave was slipstreaming him into the hairpin at Westwood and pulled out to pass just as dad approached a slower car. 'I've got him!,' thought Dave, and at that moment dad put on his turn signal. Dave lifted his foot, thought `what



the '????,' and then realized, too late, what had happened as dad pulled in front of him to win the race! When they got back to the pits, Dave asked him why he used the turn signal. GB just grinned and said, 'Why did you lift your foot?' A few comments were heard about the crafty old fox, etc. and everybody had a good laugh."

Bob Wilkinson from Black Butte Ranch, Oregon, who first met GB and Lydia at Westwood in the late '60s when he was racing a TR3 remembers, "The Sternes home was always open for U.S. people and they always had a great post race time at the house."

For Roland Gilbert and many other of the younger drivers, the Sternes' social events were warmly remembered. "G.B. and Lydia have been like a second set of parents to myself, and attendance at Lydia's Boxing Day Brunch was always a special occasion for wife Pat and I."

For others it was the little shop in Burnaby that became the beacon for dreams relating to Morgan ownership. Long time Morgan Owners Group Northwest member Bob Nelson, a Washington, USA, resident, found it hard to take when, on one of his visits to the Great White North for parts (the first time he actually had one of his Mogs running well enough to come up to Canada with the car) the shop was closed.

The Best Thing Ever for the Sternes

I think from my recent conversation with Lydia in preparing this article, that both the Sternes would feel that

the development and implementation of the Novice Driver Award system for the ICSCC, first launched in 1983, would be the best ever event for both of them.

What other husband and wife team could set up and make this award fair and functional - George's driving career of 19 years, coupled with Lydia's experience at the track and in pit support work, with Lydia doing just about every event job short of the race starter.

The 1990 International Conference of Sports Car Club's Banquet took place Nov. 17th and it is fitting that special mention of this achievement was respectfully noted in the program as follows: "The Novice Driver of the year award is named the G.B. Sterne. G.B. and Lydia were active supporters of the Conference, G.B. being our first Vice-President. Always helping new drivers, George and Lydia ran the Novice Licensing program in the late sixties, and gave many of G.B.'s trophies to the Novices."

It was always fun to note in some of the articles by local columnists the speculation on how many trophies G. B. would finally wind up with. So to Tom Rosseter, Alan Daniels, and Nicole Parton (nee Strickland in 1975), whose great write-ups in the mid-70s helped all cope with the loss of Morgans being imported into Canada at the time, the final count is four-hundred and one.

Special thanks must go to Lydia for spending a half day with me in February, 1991, and providing for me, along with some great pictures, contacts and material, the real inspiration to write this tribute.

Obituary ***George Beatty Sterne*** ***Apr 9, 1912 - Oct 15, 1990*** **Ken Hill**

It is with sadness I have to report the death of George Beatty Sterne, who died suddenly on Monday, 15th October as a result of a heart attack, at the age of 78. Although not well known in the U.K., 'G.B.' as he was popularly known, enjoyed justifiable fame on the North American Continent.

G. B. started racing Morgans in 1954, at the age of 42, and it was not until 1956 that he had his first win. During the next 19 years 'G. B.' won no less than 400 trophies before he retired from racing in 1976, every one of them in a Morgan.

The Morgans he used in his career were:- 1954-56 Plus 4, 1957-59 Plus 4 four seater; 1960-62 Plus 4 four seater; 1963-65 Plus 4 Super Sports; 1966-68 Plus 4 Competition model; 1969-72 Plus 8; 1973-75 4/4 Competition model.

In 1956 'G.B.' wrote to the Morgan Motor Company asking to become the Canadian West Coast agent. At first the Company refused, but after repeated attempts 'G.B.' got the agency which he held until he retired from active

business at the end of 1976. His son Bob took over the business, and continued as Morgan agent until the mid 1980's.

Throughout his racing career his wife Lydia played a big part in the racing team; she attended nearly every race, helped in the pits, and of course did nearly every other job over the years, including lap scoring, timing, and flag marshalling, as well as having several races herself.

There can be no doubt that 'G.B.' helped the Morgan cause in North America more than maybe any other of his contemporaries. His enthusiasm, technical knowledge, and his willingness to help Morgan owners in both Canada and America, will long be remembered. The Morgan Sports Car Club extends its sincere sympathy to Lydia and his son Bob.

[MC note: Bob Sterne had two corrections for the obituary Ken Hill wrote:

- 1) When GB started racing in 1954 it was in an MG TD;*
- 2) Between 1954 and 1956, GB raced an MG TD. The first Morgan he owned (and raced) was a 1957 Plus 4 4-Seater which he raced from 1957 to 1959.]*