

# Burnaby**now**

## Burnaby's great-granddaddy of racing

### He used to race sidecar motorcycles before coming to Canada

[Tom Berridge](#) / Burnaby Now

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As a young boy, Al Ores experienced the last days of the Third Reich as the German army was pushed back in its retreat through his native Slovenia.

Out of school and just 10 years old, Ores described those final years of Second World War as shivering in ditches, but in a strange way exciting.

After the war, the Burnaby resident worked as an apprentice mechanic at a motorcycle factory in Austria, where he found another form of excitement.

It was there that Ores caught the racing bug, acting as the daring human ballast with only leather headgear and goggles to protect him from the dirt track, racing motorcycle sidecars in Europe, before immigrating to Canada in 1953.

In Canada, Ores married and raised four children, whom he later introduced to auto racing at the old Westwood track in Coquitlam.

In 1963, he began a 30-year career at Bert's Automotive in Vancouver, where his competitive instincts were to take a lifechanging turn.

There, Ores and work colleagues Charlie Gedecke and owner Bert Laakmann made a bet over who would be first to back out of a driver's training course at Westwood.

None of them did and it eventually led to Ores buying out his friends' share of the Volkswagen Beetle-powered Bobsy Formula Vee. In his first senior race, Ores finished runner-up in a 30-car open-wheel field.

"It started out I was to be the mechanic, but I needed a licence to take the car out on the track. It gets to you. You try to get people in the car, and somehow if you like the sport, you sort of prove to yourself, 'I did good, how can I get faster next time to get up with the gang?' It took me two years to get up front," Ores said.

In his second season of International Conference of Sports Car Clubs racing, Ores won his first race at Westwood on his 36th birthday.

With his then-teenaged son Mike, Ores built and raced Vees, including a near-new Caldwell D13, which he raced throughout the Pacific Northwest, winning numerous club awards over the past 31 years.

In 1979 and again in 1988, Ores won the conference Formula Vee championship. He was also the first Canadian to win the sportsmanship award, which he earned in 1996.

Last year, he was honoured with a 10th Sports Car Club of B.C. sportsmanship shield, that will be named after Ores in years to come. During the annual association's trophy presentation, Ores was given a mock knighthood by local Burnaby business owner Ian Wood, of IWE rear ends.

"Anything for a laugh," Ores said.

Ores has the distinction of holding the never-to-be broken track record for open-wheel Vees at Westwood, which closed down in 1990.

Ores, who is still instructing novice drivers after 42 years, was also said to have inspired the late, great Greg Moore to get into open-wheel racing.

With decades of dedication to motorsport behind him, Ores, who used to drive the pace car for supporting races at the Molson Vancouver Indy, was inducted into the B.C. Motorsports Hall of Fame in 2002 as a pioneer in the sport.

"You don't make any money out of it, but we can get together afterwards and tell each other how good we are," Ores said. "Camaraderie, that's what it is. Out there, you might be fierce as you could be, but in the pits, you share clutch parts, bearings, tires, anything to get them out on the track."

One time, he lent a spare engine to his son-in-law who then used it to beat Ores to the finish line in a race.

At 80 years young, Ores still can't shake the racing bug.

In fact, it has become more of a family affair than ever, with wife Ann and daughters Diana, Tricia and Jennifer still supporting pops and brother Mike as competitor and crew, while grandkids help out cleaning cars and changing tires for Ores and their fathers.

"When all nine grandkids are there and I have two great-grandkids, they call my pit, the daycare centre," Ores quipped.

"I just want to hang in for at least two more years. My grandson Robbie will get his licence next year and I would like to run a couple of races with him."

He recently drove in the fourth annual Family Affair Racing Team or FART at Mission Raceway, an arrive-and-drive event started up by Scott and Jennifer Arthur of Mission and Ladner's Bob and Pam Williams, which benefits Covenant House, an organization that provides food, shelter and guidance to homeless street youth.

Ores also has plans to see many old friends at the 50th anniversary race at Thunderhill in San Francisco this fall.

"It's too bad that I'm old," he mused.

"I would have liked to get into a sedan - an American sedan - a Chevy. I'd like to try, not really NASCAR, a road course - a Yank tank - you can throw it around the way you like it."

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