

Brian's passion for racing big cats

Motor-racing drivers once built and tuned their own cars and locals rubbed shoulders with the world's best in the pits, according to a retired Paparangi mechanic.

Brian Watson, who used to race Jaguars, has recorded his recollections, and an extensive outline of Jaguar racing history in New Zealand, in his book, *Jaguar Memories*.

"I wanted to write something of what I had done and seen before I got too old," he said. The resulting book was 23 years in the making. It has about 200 photos and 300 pages documenting the history of Jaguar racing, with each chapter devoted to a different model.

"There are so many people in it from all the early years of motor-racing, the 1950s to the 1970s. It went on and on like Topsy and it just grew," Watson said.

"It's taken me quite a while, because people have disappeared or died, and photos were hard to get. It was almost 50 years ago. It's a New Zealand history. But we are a young country and any history we have we don't want to lose."

Watson began his career as a mechanic at Wright Stephenson's, servicing trucks and Vauxhall cars. After 10 years he became a Jaguar agent.

"I went to Archer and Lupp because I wanted to improve my tuning skills and the only one who knew anything about tuning was Lionel Archer," he said. He fell in love with the Jag's twin overhead camshaft engines. "Other makers were still building overhead valve, push-rod motors," he said.

"I've built them; raced them; hill-climbed them and sprinted them."

In those days, New Zealand motor-racing was more down-to-earth. At circuits such as Levin and Pukekohe, local drivers would rub shoulders with the sport's international elite. "You'd line up, have your car here. Next door you'd have the Lotus team, and then the Cooper team."

He recalled turning up for scrutineering, and finding one other vehicle. "The other car was a Formula One Lotus." The driver queued ahead of him was the legendary Jim Clark.

The overawed girl asked Clark for his licence, meaning his competition licence. Smiling, Clark, a farmer in Scotland, first produced his dog licence and then his pedigree bull breeder's licence, before finally showing her his driver's licence.

That year Clark went on to win the Tasman Series, the Indianapolis 500 and the world drivers' championship for Lotus.

Things had changed in other ways in the last 30 or 40 years, Watson said "When I was a mechanic, you did everything on a car. Then people specialised. Wheels and alignment, to engines.

"Now you've got the situation where a mechanic is just a fitter of parts. We even used to make the parts."

To buy *Jaguar Memories*: email cwtzim@paradise.net.nz